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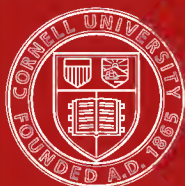
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RANDOLPH HONOR

BY THE
AUTHOR OF INGEMISCO



NEW YORK
RICHARDSON AND COMPANY
14 BOND-STREET
1868

A.252508

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RANDOLPH HONOR.

CHAPTER I.

"There's nothing new in life, and nothing old—
The tale that we might tell hath oft been told."

MRS. JAMESON.

RADETTE!" — She stood leaning from the window which opened on the portico, and fronted the broad lawn. With clear vistas between its grand old forest-trees, that lawn sloped down to undulating terraces around the bluff, at the beachen foot of which the moonlit Chesapeake rippled with a low murmur. There from the right swept the Patuxent to lose itself in the bay. A bowery garden, divided from the lawn by a high square-cut yew-hedge, steeply overhung the river's marge. And as the young girl's glance ranged thence to the Chesapeake, glinting through the oaks to south and east, this promontory bore the semblance of an island, lone and far from those faint blue shores across the sparkling waters.

At the sound of the voice she started, and her glance reverted to the dense shade on the upper terrace. There glimmered to and fro a red spark, suggestive of cigars and "reveries of a bachelor."

She threw open the window to the floor, and flitted in pursuit of that beacon, her white dress waving through the shadows.

"You called me, Mr. Randolph?" she said, when both paused beneath the trees.

"Aye, my fairy-fire"—drawing, as he spoke, her hand within his arm—"I saw you yonder, solitary as Mariana in her moated Grange, while I had need of you here. Was that tyrannical?"

"Not more tyrannical than grim guardians from time immemorial. But, guardian mine, where have you been this evening? So charming a party! That delightful last galop—you know it, do you not?" And she hummed the air, gliding for an instant into the step of the dance, while she yet retained his arm.

"And how many hearts have the little dancing feet of my will-o'-the-wisp—my Fadette—enticed into the Slough of Despond to-night?" he asked, staying where the moon-beams lay silver-clear upon the stile which crossed the old yew-hedge, and looking down upon her somewhat sadly.

"Oh, every Christian of them all, of course. But you have not told me why you absented yourself? You never saw any thing so perfectly lovely as Nannie Lowe. And Agatha—But I forget, we of sweet sixteen are rather too juvenile to be honored by your sageship's admiration. Miss Goldsborough inquired most kindly for you, sir;" and she glanced up at him mischievously.

The grave face was yet graver than its wont, the mouth, usually so calm, contracted once as if in pain, and the dark eyes were fixed moodily upon the sward. Unaccustomed to have word or smile of hers unanswered thus, the girl perceived his abstraction, and said gently, putting off her mocking mood:

"Something troubles you, Mr. Randolph. What is it?"

"Much, Fadette—and chiefly you."

She met his earnest look with one of bewildered incredulity. But seeing that he spoke in all truth, she hurriedly

removed her hand, the deep rose-color rushing to her brow, and stood with head averted, but in expectant attitude.

After a moment he began:

"I could not see you with the gay throng to-night, little one, because to-night we must part."

"Part! We!" she exclaimed. "Surely, dear guardian, I can have done nothing seriously to displease you? Is it because I am too light, too giddy, that you will send me away? Ah, let me stay, and I will try—I will try—"

She clung to his arm again, as if she would make his manly strength her own support.

He replied to her appealing gaze most tenderly.

"My child," he said, "through all your sweet short life, since first you brightened my gray home with your sunny childish smiles and mischiefs, has ever fault of yours been a fault to me? It is not that I send you away. I myself go hence with to-morrow's dawn."

"But where, Mr. Randolph? Only to Baltimore, is it not? You will not be absent long?"

"There was an evening that we stood beneath these very trees when these young leaves were in bud, and my Faddette's eyes brightened and her cheek flushed, while, raising her hand defiantly, she cried, 'Shame upon the trampling-out of our forefathers' 'foot-prints on the sands of time!' Honor to those who tread once again and deeper in those foot-prints, until they stand upon the underlying rock.' Does she think I then proclaimed duties for others, from which I myself shrink back? or would let the true Randolph honor go, to hold fast its emblem, these old walls and acres? Heretofore business arrangements have compelled me to delay in Maryland, but I am now free to follow my first impulse, to join our army in Virginia. Will you not bid me God-speed, and choose me your champion?"

His tone was light, but he bent down to read her vary-

ing face, anxiously. She bowed her head to conceal the starting tears, saying, with a tremor in her voice—

“I know that you are right. I am proud that you go. But oh, what shall I do, what shall I do when you are gone?”

“It was not alone to speak of myself that I summoned you,” he said, after a moment; “I must plan for you, too, my ward. You know that when, twelve years ago, you, a wee girl, were intrusted to my guardianship by my closest friend, your father, it was his injunction that on your seventeenth birthday you should choose between my home and that of your mother’s brother. Now, therefore, draws near the day of your choice, and—”

“My dear guardian,” she interrupted, “can you doubt what that must be? Could I ever be so happy beneath another roof as yours? Could I ever love another home as I love Randolph Honor?”

“Child, you are rash. You may not determine in ignorance of that which you refuse. You say you will miss me here. Why then not pay this visit now, which one day or other must be paid? Remember, your uncle has claims upon you stronger than—than I dare hope to have—and it is your duty to acknowledge them. I have to-day,” he added, extending to her an open letter, “received this, wherein your uncle urges, in the warmest terms, your coming to him in your mother’s old Charleston home. Yes, keep it to read. You will see there is a special invitation for your rough canine pet. How have you deluded Mr. Rutledge into the belief that Leo actually did save your life?”

“Ah, my faith is not to be shaken, though Lionel does insist that had I not been too terrified to stand upright, the water would scarcely have reached my shoulder. By the way, I accepted to-day one invitation for the dear old Leo—

he is gone to Mrs. Goldsborough, who is in perfect terror of robbers and what not, since her son went down to Dixie. But we won't hear of any more visits."

"Your uncle has the right, my child. Though circumstances have separated you much hitherto, yet I am convinced you will be happy under his protection. I now regret that we went again to Europe last year, otherwise you might have had months instead of weeks in his house, in which to form your decision, and—"

"For my decision—it would have been the very same. And I am sure I shall never regret my Fall in the Alps, my Winter in Munich," she interrupted, impatiently. "I won't go, Mr. Randolph."

"Fadette!"

She was silent—abashed. Presently she raised her head, and said resolutely:

"Well, if you think I ought, I will. But only for the war—only until you return to Randolph Honor. You will promise me that?"

"Then," he replied evasively, "my will-o'-the-wisp will have been flitting so long through Carolina marshes that she cannot be recaptured, nor will she remember old Maryland beaten paths."

"Sir, I repel the base insinuation," she cried, drawing herself up in playful indignation; "and I renounce forever your sobriquet of 'Fadette,' since it must needs be a type of inconstancy. But come, your promise. No subterfuges, if you please."

"No, Fadette; your uncle's house is now your proper home."

She stood perfectly bewildered. Then she said slowly:

"I cannot understand you, Mr. Randolph. I do not think you mean that you are weary of me. I think you love me yet. Do you not?"

She paused for his reply.

"Yes, Fadette, I do," he said, very quietly.

"Then why in the world— Ah, I have it, you naughty guardian! You are to be married, and Mistress Randolph, née—let me see—Dorsey—or—Goldsborough—may not—"

She stopped, her idle words checked by the rebuke of her companion's grave calm eyes.

After a moment he spoke:

"You shall know from me why you may no longer call Randolph Honor your home. Others would tell it you if I did not. It is because"—his voice had a harsh ring in it—"although I am more than twice your own age, and although to you I am only the guardian old enough to be your father, yet the world deems me still too young to be the proper protector of a young girl."

She blushed crimson.

"I—I will go," she hastened to reply. "But when, and how?"

"I will write to-morrow from Baltimore, where I can make the necessary arrangements. It is unsafe for you to remain here with Aunt Randolph for sole defender, when in these troublous times we know not how soon Maryland may become the battle-ground. Moreover, unruly little Fadette sees only too well that her will is law and right to Aunt Randolph, and it is impossible to foretell into what mischief she might drag the staid old maiden. And I cannot have my ward so beyond my ken, as must be were she here without the Confederate lines."

No answer to his smile in Fadette's downcast face, but upon the long black lashes there glittered a tear.

He replaced her arm within his, and drew her on beside the great yew-hedge, where the gravelled path was bordered here and there by tall dense clumps of roses, arching bloomy branches high across the way, and over the heads

of the two, who, both within the medium height of either sex, paced on.

"This is the last time," he said, at length breaking the silence—"the last time, it may be, that we shall walk thus together upon this yew terrace, where we have had so many walks and talks in days gone by. Have you no word of comfort for me, when in one short half-hour we must part? Are you angry with me, my darling?"

"I am not angry," she replied constrainedly: "I have had no time to think. Oh, you are very cruel to me, Mr. Randolph," she cried impetuously, dropping his arm; and throwing herself upon a lower step of the stile, she burst into a storm of indignant tears.

He stood at her side, deep pity and tenderness in his manner. Once he bent down, while his brow flushed, and his lips moved as though he would have spoken. But he refrained. When her passionate weeping was at an end, he said:

"You know, my Fadette, that if I am cruel to you it is but for your own sake, and I am far more cruel to myself. You are yet scarcely more than a child, life lies before you in which to be beloved, and you will not fail to win friends in your new home as in your old. Mine I have already won or lost, and my chief treasure I part with, because it is not well for her to be mine. Will she then blame me, that I give her into better keeping? Trust me, I would not suffer my darling to go did I not know she would be safer and happier."

She had calmed herself while he was speaking, and now gave him her hand, striving to smile.

"I will try to do contentedly all that you wish," she whispered; "it is only that I am so grieved to leave Randolph Honor and Aunt Randolph, and—and you."

Again the rebellious tears started, but she checked them resolutely, and added:

"Now tell me of yourself. Does Aunt Randolph know you are going so soon? Why did you not tell me before?"

"Because I did not purpose leaving until next week. Aunt Randolph knows. I summoned her from the drawing-room while you were dancing; and the cause of a departure thus sudden, thus secret, is a note I this evening received from a friend in Baltimore, informing me upon undoubted authority that orders have been issued for my arrest. Were there the most remote probability of charges being made public, and trial permitted, I would remain here and bide the result; but as affairs are now, I might serve my country to better purpose than mouldering in some cell of the modern Bastille. Therefore, with the morrow's dawn I shall have eluded the clutches of King Abraham's myrmidons."

Fadette started.

"Hark!" she whispered. "Did you not hear—a rustling in the bushes—a sound? I am sure it was like a suppressed chuckle."

"I have frightened you into imagining spies, ambuscades, and how many horrors besides! Nay, I am not quite so important a personage, although I might be worth a *lettre de cachet*."

"Ah, Mr. Randolph, do not jest," she made answer tremblingly. "But come, let us find out whether any one be near. Pray do!"

So great was her alarm, that to soothe it, Mr. Randolph, bidding her remain where she was, walked toward the clustering bushes whence she declared the sound had proceeded. Had she followed, her apprehensive glance might have discovered that which his careless one failed to do—a crouched shadow, other than those of roses and yew-hedge, blending with theirs upon the grass.

"Four-and-twenty tailors marched to catch a snail," he

said, presently throwing himself beside her on the stile. "How that saucy brother of mine would laugh at us for a pair of cowards! Would not recruit me into his company, would he?"

"Oh, how soon you are to see Lionel! And you *will* join his company, won't you?" was her eager rejoinder.

"What! submit my thirty-eight years of experience to the boy whom I have brought up? No, no, Fadette—an older captain for me. But I shall undoubtedly see him, and, indeed, enter the same regiment, under Jackson."

"Boy, indeed! he is twenty-one! But I see—I had forgotten his captaincy. You must tell him, with my love, how I watch for his name in the papers, as for his homecoming. By the way, do you not think he may return to Maryland on recruiting service? He has before, you know."

"Possibly. But there is greater probability of your hearing from, or even seeing him, when you are once within the Confederacy. Fadette, will you watch for me as you watch for him?" He lowered his voice.

"I will watch for you, Mr. Randolph"—she was too honest to repeat "as for him;" "but I should not fear for you if I heard nothing, for I know you would always be right. While Lionel—"

Those summits of unapproachable superiority, above the mists of doubts, and fears, and anxieties, which hover over lower regions—how cold they are! Mr. Randolph looked chilled in their atmosphere.

"What of Lionel?" he asked, filling up her pause. "He would be wrong, would he?"

"How can you say so!" she exclaimed, vexed; "how could I mean that? But Lionel—well, he is so gay and thoughtless—he is so much younger. And I cannot think of my playmate wise and strong as you, Mr. Randolph."

Neither did Mr. Randolph find wisdom's paths the paths of pleasantness, apparently. But he made no remark, merely assuring her that the message should be duly delivered.

"And now," he said, moving into the moonlight to consult his watch, "we have overtaken 'the wee small hours ayont the twal'," and your fairy kindred will be stirring anon. So let us within."

They retraced their steps, and ascended the brow of the gently rising ground where was built Randolph Honor. Both turned to take farewell of the scene which they were leaving.

Facing the expanse of waters, and the shadowy terraces and undulating slopes, with low, hilly ranges closing in the far horizon in its rear, stood Randolph Honor, that ivied mansion of the good old times. Its walls of gray stone irregularly hewn, and cemented with broad, jagged lines of white mortar; its spacious front, and rambling, unexpected gables; its clusters of peaked chimneys, and eccentric round, or square, or pointed windows, glittering through the large-branched trees in the moonbeams, added a picturesque feature to the scene. Hospitality the prominent characteristic, there was no resisting the broad invitation of portico and entrance, where roses, woodbine, and clematis held a mortgage upon column and wall. The night-breeze came laden with mingled fragrance, as guardian and ward drew near.

"I am looking my last on Randolph Honor; for oh, Mr. Randolph, it will be Randolph Honor no longer when you are gone. I am not sure, after all, that I could bear to stay," Fadette said, sorrowfully.

They stood within the hall, at the foot of the great oak stairs, and Mr. Randolph had lighted Fadette's candle by the swinging lamp overhead. He silently held out his hand. She put hers into it.

"One word," he said. "Promise me that if but the shadow of sorrow ever darken your life, you will remember you are dearer to me than all the world besides. Promise me that you will tell me of it, and that you will rely upon me. If all be not well with you in your new home, remember that though I may not now be with you, I may and will care for you. In that case, your shelter shall be with Aunt Randolph, whose love has been long tried."

She assured him, brokenly, that she would ever look to him—that none could take his place; and then she turned and slowly ascended the stairs. But when she had reached her chamber, and set down her candle upon the dressing-table, so helpless a feeling of loneliness came over her, such a longing to see him yet once again, that, yielding to the impulse, she recrossed the corridor and descended the stairs with a flying step. In the hall where she had left him he still remained, his arm upon the balustrade, his eyes shaded with his hand. She stayed upon the step above him, and called his name, softly.

He lifted his head. Yet after one rapid glance, he resumed his former posture. But although his face was thus partly shielded from her, Fadette grew pale before the settled anguish of that one glance, and for an instant thought that he suffered intense physical pain, his mouth was so fixed, so rigid in its expression of endurance.

"I am so loth to part," she murmured, "that I am come again to say good-bye."

He could turn from her no more when her tones thus quivered, and a trembling, beseeching touch was laid upon his arm. And ere long she had perched herself upon the balustrade, partly supported by a hand upon her guardian's shoulder, exchanging from time to time words of hope, which faltered into half-uttered fears—bright promises of the future, changing into dull regrets.

At length she rose, saying—

“But you will be so weary, you cannot have even your two or three hours of rest, if I do not run away now. You go at half-past four? I shall come down and pour out your coffee.”

“No, Fadette, I would not part with you a second time. Aunt Randolph will attend to my comfort. And now again, good-bye. God be with you, my own, my own!”

It was almost in a groan that he ended, and he gazed earnestly in her face, as she flung back with a toss of the head that heavy braid of purple-black hair escaped from the comb, low upon her cheek. He marked the rich carmine glow; the pure transparent brunette tints; the full red lips, half parted in a sigh; the dewy, deep-brown eyes; the thoughtful line upon the low, broad brow. This last arrested his attention.

“Time must not change my Fadette until we meet again;” he said, “and that it may not, she must banish that naughty, cross wrinkle from her brow. Sadness has no place there, my darling.”

She tried to smile, and to retort, but voice failed her. She could only murmur, when, with another hand-clasp, he would have put her away—

“When we last parted for long, it was not thus. Am I less dear to you now?”

He understood, and bending down, kissed her forehead lightly. Then with another tearful attempt at a smile, she fled up the stairs, without venturing one downward look.

She drew a low seat into the bay-window of her chamber, overlooking the Chesapeake. She leaned her arms upon the deep sill, and rested her chin in her hands. Her gaze fell where the bay lay broad and silvery in the moonlight; where the red and green lights of a steamer passed swiftly on, yet seemed to loiter in the distance; where

waves tossed fitfully in the wake of ruder gusts, as drifting clouds obscured the moon.

All this she seemed to see, but saw not, looking yearningly toward the past, blankly toward the future. Perchance anon some bright vision there—for she was yet a girl, and what girl fears the future?—flitted before her tear-dazzled eyes. For once a smile just hovered on her lips, though this was quickly followed by a burst of weeping.

Tired out at last, and lulled by the surging of the waves, she became calm. Gradually the shadows of those long-curved lashes wavered on her cheek—her head drooped upon her arms, now crossed on the window-sill—and just as she was summoning resolution to rise and undress, she slept.

The moonbeams rested upon the serene brow and the tapering folded hands, and her breathing was light and untroubled as the breeze which stirred the raven tresses veiling her dimpled shoulders.





CHAPTER II.

ERE DAWN.

"Clouds in the evening sky more densely gather."—*SALIS.*

SHE awoke with that sudden start, that impulse of alarm, wherewith danger sometimes warns in sleep. She opened her eyes upon dense darkness, and was at first so bewildered that she knew not where she was. The chill night-wind, however, roused her, and, shivering, she rose to close the window. The night had changed while she slept. Hurrying clouds, made visible only by occasional lurid flashes, swept over the moon, and mutterings of the white and angry bay responded to the sullen echoes of the thunder.

Fadette had always declared herself "devoted" to thunder-storms, and she leaned from the window watching the on-coming of this. Presently, in one of those lulls which precede the wilder thunder-crash, she became conscious of a near presence, and, listening intently, distinguished a footfall crunching upon the gravelled walk beneath. Bending forward, her very breathing suppressed, she distinctly heard the low tones of a voice, and a transient gleam of lightning parting the blackness, threw into relief, against the white columns of the portico, the figure of a man. She drew back, and clenched her hands together to assure herself by corporeal evidence that she was not still asleep, for in her dreams but now had Lionel Randolph's home-

coming thus appeared. Possessed with the thought of him, she returned to her place and called softly—

“Lionel, is that you?”

There was a brief silence, during which she thought she discerned the sound of hastily retreating steps. Terrified now, she was about to arouse the house and give the alarm of she knew not what, when there came the low answer to her question—

“Yes, it is Lionel Randolph. Come down and let me in, will you—quick!”

“But—but—are you sure it is you, Lionel?” She hesitated, peering down anxiously into the dark. “Is no one with you?”

This time the reply was prompt.

“Yes, yes, one of my company. Quick, or we may be discovered!”

“Oh, I am so glad, so glad!” she cried; and catching up a light shawl, throwing it over her evening dress, she passed out into the corridor, delaying not even to strike a light. As she groped her way along to the stairs, she stayed an instant at the door of her guardian’s chamber.

“Lionel is come, Mr. Randolph,” she called, rapping once or twice. She did not wait to hear his questions, but added:

“I was up, and am going to let him in;” and he heard her light foot upon the stairs.

As she felt for the great bolt of the hall-door a mysterious awe crept over her, and her fingers trembled so that she was forced to pause. For one moment she was tempted to return for a light; then she remembered she had been bidden to hasten.

“Lionel! Lionel!” she called in an affrighted whisper, putting her mouth to the keyhole.

The silence was unbroken, save by the surging of tem-

pestuous wind and waves, and the clashing of the boughs against the portico. She shivered as though the storm had power to shake her too. Her first impulse of distrust rushed back upon her. With it came the memory of a self-murdered Randolph of a generation years before the Revolution, who still, the servants had oftentimes borne witness, was wont on such a night as this to pace beneath the casement of his false love, who had spurned him for the heir, his brother. But, coward as she was, she was more afraid of Lionel's unmerciful raillery upon the display of her cowardice, than of all the terrors conjured up by night. So she mustered all her courage, drew the refractory bolt, and the door creaked heavily upon its hinges.

Instantly there was a rush of trampling feet in the darkness. Fadette shrank back, cowering, against the wall.

Amid muttered oaths, and demands for light, and suppressed objurgations, consigning "that fool of a woman" to Hades at mildest, her heart beat so violently that she was fain to clasp her hands over it, terrified lest its throbbings, which to her were so fearfully audible, might betray her.

Now she had almost shrieked aloud, as some one brushed by her, crouched in her corner. Suddenly it flashed upon her mind, before absorbed in vague awe of the supernatural—of the midnight powers of the air, of hobgoblins, or of storied robber-hordes—that these must be men sent to effect that arrest of which Mr. Randolph had spoken.

Thought for him on the instant overcame apprehension for herself. Collecting her wandering ideas, she remembered that the library, the door of which was close at hand, opened also into another hall, whence a staircase led up into the corridor above.

For one second she shuddered at the idea of threading through that throng; but the next, her resolution was

taken. And moving warily, albeit blindly, she eluded collision, gained the library, and fled on until she stood with palpitating heart at the far end of the hall above, before her guardian's door.

He was just coming out, candle in hand.

"What is it?" he asked hastily, observing her changing color, and hearing the commotion below.

"Come away—away," she gasped. "They are seeking you—I know they are. It is not Lionel. The hall is filled with armed men; I heard the clash of their bayonets. Quick, quick, Mr. Randolph—they are all in the front hall—you can surely escape by the back."

A shade of deeper gravity darkened his brow. But he replied, calmly:

"No. They cannot have omitted to surround the house. Better remain where I am than attempt an unsuccessful escape."

"Quick, then—let me conceal you in Aunt Randolph's dressing-room."

"And be caught like a rat in a trap? No, thank you, little lady, I will brave it out. And if the worst come to the worst, a few weeks of hermit life will do me no great harm."

He was silent upon the true motive for surrendering himself—the dread of leaving two defenceless women exposed to the insolence of a baffled soldiery.

He re-entered his dressing-room, followed by Fadette. He took from the table a pair of pistols, examining and loading one, while she held the other toward him in readiness.

"Nay, my little one," he said, as, relieving her of the weapon, he looked up and smiled into her blanched face, where the large dark eyes were grown larger and darker than ever, dilated with the wild gaze of a startled fawn.

"Fear not, I am not going to carry the war into Africa, but merely to bully the rascals into a few stipulations of my own. Remain where you are while I go to meet them; and the very moment we leave the house, do you flit down and secure the door. Nay, do not weep, my darling," he soothed, as she clung to him.

"I—I have brought all this upon you," she sobbed.

"Hush, hush," he replied, kissing her brow, and putting her away gently; "and if you love me, remain here until these men are gone. Aunt Randolph shall come to you. There is no danger; no, none for me, trust me."

She covered her face, sinking upon her knees, her brow pressed against the cold marble of the table, in an agony of weeping. He cast one yearning, lingering glance upon her, ere, placing one pistol in his belt and taking the other in his hand, he left the room, closing the door.

Meantime, matches had been produced and the hall-lamp relighted. The gleam of bayonets wavered to and fro below, and several soldiers were beginning to mount the stairs. Mr. Randolph came forward to the landing and confronted them.

"Why are you here? What do you want?" he demanded of the foremost.

The man, a lank, slouching specimen of the genuine "Down-Easter," stole one glance at the pistols, and another at the muscular though lightly-built frame and resolute eye of his interrogator. He shuffled uneasily, and turned, as if appealing to those in his rear.

"We want Lloyd Randolph the traitor, that's what we want," growled a gruff voice from behind.

The right hand tightened upon the pistol, and was instinctively half raised; but the creaking movement of a door, which stood ajar far up the corridor, admonished of a watcher. The grasp relaxed.

"I am Lloyd Randolph," he replied, folding his arms and awaiting further explanation. Whereupon, from the background where he had heretofore, with commendable discretion, remained, advanced a fiercely moustached manikin, duly striped, brass-buttoned, and epauletted, his officership most unmistakably proven by the long sword clanking at his heels.

"Den you be my prisoner, sare," he announced, with a flourish of his chapeau, falling into position, his right foot stoutly planted on an upper step, his right hand laid martially upon the hilt of the very obvious sword.

"So be it, upon one condition," responded Mr. Randolph: "That to avoid disturbance in the house, you withdraw your men to the lawn. Then, and not until then, I surrender."

"Bon—ver' good," the officer rejoined, smiling sarcastically; "dat is enough well—give you fine chance for to save yourself."

"How, sir! when I have given my word?" thundered Mr. Randolph, in a towering passion. And, forgetful of prudence, he seized the poor little emissary by the collar, shaking him until, half-throttled, he stammered—

"Pardon, pardon; I have but jested, sare."

Mr. Randolph let go his hold. But the unfortunate lieutenant, too suddenly released, after one violent effort to maintain his tottering dignity, reeled backward, and went rolling over and over in a series of not the most graceful somersaults, the soldiers upon either hand clearing the road for his "masterly retreat," until he reached the end of the flight, decidedly *hors du combat*.

While he rose to his feet, crimson with anger and gesticulating furiously, an unrestrained shout of laughter rang through the house from the yet undisciplined recruits, who held their diminutive foreign commander in no great re-

spect. And that half-closed door creaked again sympathetically.

Meantime, the keen eyes of Mr. Randolph had espied through the parting crowd the familiar face of a mechanic from the neighboring village, who had long borne him a grudge for some slight offence, and whose abolition proclivities had been more than once suspected by the planters of the vicinity.

"Ha," he exclaimed, "there is the spy and informer! Here, any of you fellows who may have manliness to despise a sneak, throw me up yonder scoundrel." But not ambitious of becoming "the cynosure of neighboring eyes," the detected man had already disappeared.

Aroused by the unseasonable mirth, Aunt Randolph herself had emerged from her chamber, and now advanced along the corridor, her hands uplifted in amazement. The tall spectral form, arrayed in a hastily-donned trailing white wrapper, was a fitting adjunct to the scene. It might have been a troubled spirit disturbed in midnight hour of wandering, by intrusive mortal presence and obtrusive mortal levity. As on this figure passed, the terrified yet amused watcher, ensconced behind the door, thought rather irreverently—

"Thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks do part,
And each particular hair doth stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine."

Mr. Randolph, turning and beholding the new-comer, hastened to say to her:

"Do not be alarmed—an earlier summons than I anticipated, that is all. I must go with these men, but will communicate with you as soon as possible. Do not be down-hearted, my dear aunt."

But the dear aunt was so down-hearted, that, dropping

aghast upon an opportune sofa, she began piteously to lament and bewail the manifold sins and wickednesses of the Yankee nation. And the little Fadette was so down hearted, that when, after a few words of comfort and of hope, the prisoner was following the guard down stairs, she could not resist gliding out from her retreat, and slipping her hand in his, again murmur farewell through deep-drawn sobs.

"What's that girl boohooing about?" asked one soldier, staring upward, of another.

"Oh, she's crying because we're going away," the man returned, with a leer directed to Fadette.

Mr. Randolph did not hear this dialogue, but Fadette did, and brushed away her tears, and mastered her agitation. His last glance rested upon the fairy figure kneeling beside and tenderly soothing the old lady. She looked up, gave him one tremulous smile, and he was gone.





CHAPTER III.

FORT M. HENRY.

"Where the heart goes before, like a lamp, and illumines the pathway,
Many things are made clear which else lie hidden in darkness."

EVANGELINE.

FADETTE leaned forward from the carriage as it wheeled rapidly on out Fort Avenue, leaving Baltimore behind, and speeding over the narrow level neck of land toward its termination in the grassy parapets of Fort McHenry. Broad upon either hand lay the smooth blue waters, widening outward to the bay. Beyond, far Fort Carroll, on its little island, fronted the semicircling hills of the city, where monuments and spires rose with wooded eminences behind. To the right of the road the sides of the promontory sloped, here and there in gardens, to the water's edge; and to the left, cottages and frequent flocks of geese whitened the green common.

To Fadette's memory recurred the morning, not a year ago, when last she had sped here in a light open carriage, not, as now, with only Miss Randolph, frightened and nervous, by her side, but with a merry party, herself the merriest there. Presently further progress was stayed by the sentinel at the tall black barred gates which swung across the road from the stone walls shutting out on either hand that end of the promontory where stood the fort. And while a soldier was despatched to headquarters to request passes for the visitors, she gazed wistfully up to the hospital piazza just within, once the scene of more than one gay flirtation

during the scarcely-watched progress of grand drill or review.

Those fiery Zouaves, in flaming uniform, failed to recall to her from out the past one impulse of pride and pleasure, or even of interest in the evolutions of the light-artillery drill, the spirited horses, the dashing riding. The bugle-calls no longer echoed of tourney and of field of gold; but of field of blood and passing souls, of shrieks, and wails of death. The harmless guns mouthed forth no longer reverberations of the glory of the olden time; but threatenings of destruction for all she held dearest and most sacred. What wonder, then, that she sank back upon the cushions, to avoid recognizing the courtesy of an officer, who, in riding by, touched his cap;—while Miss Randolph, in trembling awe of military power, and regarding the closed gates before her much as a fluttering hen may be supposed to regard the entrance to the fox's hole, pressed her arm in remonstrance, bestowing the while several compensatory nods upon the rebuffed warrior.

Ingress granted at length, the gates swung open, and the carriage rolled on up the broad road dividing the drill-grounds, which stretched away with a gentle declivity to the sea-wall on either hand. And the driver drew up before a heavy wooden gate, a late addition to the defences of the fort's entrance.

Fadette glanced around. To her left, were those white cottages sprinkled over the green slopes with their intersecting gravel-paths, the sward broken here and there by triangular stacks of bomb-shells, dotting it with black. The gray surrounding sea-wall bounded placid waves gleaming in the sunshine. The shores rose beyond, across the waves, hill above hill. All was here as of old, the peaceful pageantry of war. The white tents of the Zouave camp well-nigh hid themselves, to the southwest of the fort, among the

green water-batteries which faced toward the bay. Here to the right, the high yellow rounded walls of Fort McHenry, surmounted by broad grassy parapets, rose up from the verdant dry-moat encircling, which in bright patches shone yellow as those walls with buttercups and dandelions. Overleaning it, blossomed the old apple-tree, as in summers gone. But when Fadette had passed through the new entrance, unfamiliar were bristling abattis, spiked portcullis depending from the sally-port, and a formidable array of newly-mounted guns.

"My dear, my dear, where are you going? What do you intend to do?" whispered Miss Randolph in a tremor, eyeing askance the orderly who preceded them.

"To follow that man straight to Mr. Randolph," Fadette replied, with an encouraging nod. For to the timid old lady the young girl's affection took a matronly, patronizing form, inasmuch as she feared neither man nor daylight. It was only by darkness and "the immortals" that she was overawed.

"Oh," she exclaimed, checking herself suddenly, "that portmanteau—my dear aunt, did you forget it? Will you," she added, addressing the orderly, "return to the carriage for it? My pass gives permission to admit it, provided it be searched."

Not through forgetfulness had she left that portmanteau. Nor did she now repeat her order without reckoning the moment when two officers, passing into the fort, should be near enough to hear her words and to observe her indifferent air. Why, indeed, should she be other than indifferent as to the arrival or non-arrival of a portmanteau?

Her heart sank within her as she paused upon the threshold of the prison-cell. She remembered how once in other times on entering the sally-port she had glanced, through the open door within, into this darksome place. Then she

had shuddered at its aspect, and now, shuddering yet more, she recalled the reply to her question, spoken by an officer then walking beside her: "We make no use of this cell, save when the fellow is unmanageably and vociferously drunk: it is inhabited for a few hours only, otherwise the occupant would hasten to exchange it for another vault, perhaps somewhat damper."

Not much, however, thought Fadette, surveying the dismal walls, where moisture oozed, and gathered, and trickled slowly down.

Twelve men were within the narrow precincts. One, haggard and unshorn, sat gloomily apart upon an iron bedstead at the further end, his elbows on his knees, his rough bearded chin in his hands, never moving, in dogged despair and sullen indifference, as the visitors entered. Another, at the sound of the clanking door, had started forward, then with an air of bitter disappointment turned away. An aged gray-haired gentleman was conversing with a chaplain captured in the discharge of his duties on the battle-field. Two Confederate soldiers were recounting to a select audience beside the door their experiences of camp and field; while a third, close by, whistled care down the wind to a most lugubrious tune. Mr. Randolph himself paced restlessly up and down. He held out his hand in welcome to his guests, evincing no surprise at their advent.

"I have been looking for you each day since you were advised of my residence," he said cheerily; "and just now was longing to hold old Time by the forelock, lest he should give the signal to close the gates while yet tarried the wheels of your chariot. Early, is it? But here daylight and night are not widely different, and when my watch and I were captured, we were not conveyed to the same

stronghold. Well, what thinks my kind aunt of her first appearance in prison?"

Miss Randolph could not respond in the tone of the prisoner. She surveyed the miserable apartment and its inmates in profound dismay, and stared aghast at the damp, stained walls, while the corners of her mouth fell into a yet more depressed and anxious curve.

"Nay," he said, "you came to see me, not the cell, and you must not waste one regard upon it. Remember—

‘Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage,
Hearts—’

"What hearts are those, Fadette, that take .

‘This for their hermitage?’"

"Cold, stony hearts, I should think," she responded, faintly returning his smile.

She had seated herself upon a bench beside the door, while one of the gentlemen had risen and placed his chair for Miss Randolph. Mr. Randolph leaned upon the back, conversing in a lowered tone—not so lowered, however, but that Fadette once or twice distinguished her own name, coupled with "passport"—"few weeks' delay"—"Charleston."

She shook her head with a low laugh of superior knowledge, saying to herself, "When you are free to plan, my guardian. I go after, or go not at all." She sent restless glances through the open doorway, before which the sentinel passed and repassed. Once she started up with a gesture of impatience, but resumed her seat as the orderly appeared, and with him the forgotten portmanteau.

While Miss Randolph, in anxiety for the neat *blanchisage*, rose to superintend its examination, Mr. Randolph took possession of the place beside his ward. Her hand,

clasping a simple bouquet, rested upon the back of the bench. He lifted hand and flowers together.

"For me, are they not;—to whisper of my little one in her garden at Randolph Honor; to speak a comforting language of their own throughout the weary hours?"

She raised her eyes, fixing them steadily upon his, as she said :

"Do you understand the language of flowers? These have indeed comforting words, strangely comforting words of their own. Read them carefully, carefully; and—"

She stopped, observing that the soldier, having concluded his examination of the portmanteau, seemed to be listening. But the look she bent upon the blossoms now in her guardian's keeping was significant as speech could be, and he resolved that the bouquet's message should be studied flower by flower.

Not sorrowful, as at the last parting, was her smile, when she turned upon the threshold of the dreary prison, waving her little hand once again ere the grating door shut out that vision of hope, of comfort, and of love.

As she descended the slope, drawing the trembling Miss Randolph's arm within her own, a heavier step resounded through the sally-port. The commanding officer overtook her, and walked on by her side. He was an acquaintance of years' standing, and she put a constraint upon the coldness creeping over her, more especially as Miss Randolph would not understand a hint, but slackened her pace. She told him she was about to venture a request. The cell, she said, was extremely damp and over-crowded: the Randolphs had so many of them been consumptive—Nay, he must not smile at her words, because this captive scion was of stalwart bearing. Would the colonel—could it be unreasonable to ask it?—permit Mr. Randolph to occupy one of the guard-rooms during the night? She had heard

it had one prisoner already there in solitary confinement, and she would esteem it so great a favor! She prayed pardon if she thus invaded the province of the commanding officer of Fort McHenry, but really could not think of beating a retreat until he had capitulated.

There being no serious obstacle in the way, the gallantry of an old army-officer induced him to consent to the young lady's arrangement, and, grateful beyond what he could imagine, Fadette went back over old times with no very bad grace, as he accompanied her to the carriage.

On passing the abattis, she mockingly inquired its use. The officer replied that alarms of purposed popular uprisings in Baltimore were so frequent, that additional defences were deemed necessary. Guns were turned upon the city, and the abattis designed especially for a protection against beligerent crinoline.

Fadette glanced at the bristling protection, and then down upon her own crinoline significantly.

"Allow me to remind you," she said, laughingly, "that in the days of our grandmothers there was a Bastille, where stone walls and bristling spears proved but insufficient barriers against fish-women bold. However, it may be that crinoline was not *à la mode* in La Halle."

They reached the carriage, and as the colonel assisted Fadette to her seat beside Miss Randolph, from the parade-ground rose the loved air of "Dixie" proudly on the breeze.

"My test of a rebel lady," remarked the colonel, watching the color deepening in Fadette's cheek.



CHAPTER IV.

THE ESCAPE.

"A woman's will dies hard, in the hall or on the sward."

MRS. BROWNING.

GOOD-MORNING, absent one. What, did you intend to cut me? Why so pensive? Surely you cannot have heard the news—a prisoner escaped from the fort? Mr. Wayne told me he met the jailer—I beg his pardon, the—what do they call him?—commanding officer—just now, riding post-haste to headquarters here, and evidently quite 'on the rampage.'"

The speaker, a young lady, gay and bright, laid a detaining clasp on Fadette's arm, who was walking slowly up the street, her eyes fixed upon the pavement, and had nearly passed without recognizing her friend.

"What—who—the name, Carrie?" she asked hurriedly, startled out of her abstraction.

"That I have not yet been able to learn. Mr. Wayne promised to ascertain it, and let me know. What if it should be Mr. Randolph?"

Fadette was radiant with smiles, and she turned back with her companion, whispering—

"Can you keep a secret, Carrie? Then I can tell you that it *is* Mr. Randolph."

Carrie stopped short, seizing both Fadette's hands.

"Oh, you dear, delightful schemer! How glad I am!" she cried; "for I know you *are* the schemer. But take care you do not make these confessions too publicly, lest

you chance to fill your guardian's place. These very walls have ears. I am dying to hear all, but I positively won't ask a question here. May I come round to tea this evening? Thank you, I will not fail. But hush! don't you see that Fed. watching you so closely from across the street? Captivated, evidently. 'Ah! here we are at Broadbent's. Have you looked over her lovely summer mantles? I am going to indulge. Won't you come in and give me the benefit of your opinion? No? Well, then, *au revoir*.'"

With light step and lighter heart Fadette pursued her way up Charles-street, bestowing joyous greeting upon friends whom from time to time she met.

On this sunshiny morning right gay was Baltimore with handsome equipages and crowds of leisurely-strolling pedestrians. As its streets, so are its people. No architect here legislates the householder of ton into tall edifices of red brick and mortar, narrow as the prejudices of the builder. No leader of fashion here dictates for dress rigid rules in style and coloring, regardless of the style or coloring of the wearer. But besides the orthodox brick, a brown, a white, a gray, or other neutral tint, dares venture in to form a contrast in architecture refreshing to the eye. And in the attire of the women is a rich simplicity, a delicate blending of delicate hues, indicative of true refinement. Many a round fair throat gleams from light folds of the snowy embroidered kerchief; many a slight and graceful figure is faintly defined beneath the drooping lace or cashmere shawl, the art of wearing which few women better understand. And as Fadette daintily raised her dress in the steep ascent beside Washington's monument, hers was but one of the many Cinderella feet there peeping forth.

Just then the breeze, which was blowing freshly, whirled her sunshade from the loose clasp of her hand, and after toying a moment with it, flung it some distance down

the slope. The sunlight was dazzling, the sunshade a pretty one, and Fadette remembered Miss Randolph's horror of carelessness; so looking after it with an impatient gesture, she began the pursuit.

Hardly, however, had she done so, when she observed a man cross over from the Monument sidewalk, lift the sunshade, and advance toward her.

One view convinced her of his identity with the Federal officer to whom her attention had been directed by her friend, and whom she had since noticed keeping her constantly in sight. Annoyed that an utter stranger, and, moreover, one "of that ilk," should thus persistently force himself upon her observation, she turned abruptly and hurried on.

"Pardon me, madam, but this is yours."

He had overtaken her. His manner was respectful; but there was in it a command and a power which Fadette, had she not been so thoroughly vexed, must have perceived: a command which, at all events, arrested her involuntarily, and compelled her eyes to his.

She stopped, and looked at him.

There was that in the appearance of the man which at once struck her quick perception with a sense of incongruity. His uniform, fitted for medium height, on the wearer's tall and powerfully-built frame suggested the very opposite extreme of the two French cities the riddle renders famous. Dark hair and moustaches were certainly in strange accord with the Saxon coloring of the face, and the deep-blue eyes regarding her with scarcely concealed amusement. And yet, with the first instant, the first impression passed away. There was somewhat in the proudly careless bearing, in the firm curves of the mouth, in the fearless greeting of the eyes, which precluded suspicion, and withal compelled respect. Fadette was forced to revert to the uniform to arm herself again.

She had unwittingly bowed in acknowledgment as he extended to her the parasol. But anon an impulse seized her, and she flung it into the street, and moved on, without a glance either upon him or upon the delighted passers-by.

To her surprise, he walked on by her side. And when she raised her eyes indignantly, she read in his, instead of resentment, admiration and gratification.

"Do not prejudge me impertinent," he said, very low, "if I inquire your name."

She fixed upon him a haughty stare. But he, nothing abashed, went on:

"I am the bearer of a message which I am morally certain is yours; yet the misdelivery of which it were not well to risk."

She hesitated. Visions of "durance vile" arose before her, and she felt little faith in the message.

But he waited there so respectfully, so deferentially, yet withal so determined to have his will, that she waxed impatient, and defiantly gave her name.

"To you, then, I bring a message from"—his voice sank yet lower—"Mr. Randolph. Do not regard me so suspiciously—I am not what I seem."

That was a puzzled anxious gaze she raised to him. Her thought was of Mr. Randolph himself; but no disguise could thus transform him. At all events, this was a friend, and he had tidings—it might be, tidings of the escape. A glad smile brightened her eyes and just hovered on her lips.

While this was passing through her mind, he, observing that their colloquy was attracting attention, said, hastily—

"Appoint me time and place of meeting. I cannot explain here."

A meeting would scarcely be safe at the friend's house at which she was staying. She had no time for deliberation.

"Here, at eight this evening," she responded, with characteristically rash promptness.

All this had passed in a moment's space.

Meanwhile, a gentleman who had witnessed Fadette's contemptuous treatment of the officer, and his unabashed perseverance, came up.

"Shall I rid you of this intruder?" he asked.

"If you please," she answered in her confusion, scarcely cognizant of her words.

"Take yourself off quietly, Sir," he said sternly, "or you shall learn to your cost how a Yankee dares insult a Southern woman."

At the beginning of this speech the "Yankee's" eyes flashed fire; but apparently the conclusion was rather diverting, for he smiled as he turned on his heel and sauntered away. Contemptuous glances followed, and "So much for Yankee courage" was muttered by not a few.

Fadette is pacing the floor of her boudoir in Madison-street. It is dusk, and as she stays a moment at the open window, watching the forthcoming of the stars, she remembers with a sigh of relief that there is no moon to-night. She listens. From the street below arise, faint and fainter, echoes of footsteps homeward-bound in the twilight. Through the house all is silence. She opens her door, leaning over the balustrade, listening with head bent forward. Yes, it really is eight o'clock, for old John, that unvarying timepiece, is crossing the hall to the drawing-room, with his silver waiter, tea, and cake. Now is her time. She has excused herself to her friend Carrie and to her hostess, on the plea of violent headache—to which, indeed, her throbbing temples painfully testify, as she presses her palm upon them. There is the closing of a door below, and then a footfall on the stairs. She has only time

to retreat, and to throw herself with a guilty feeling upon the sofa, before a servant taps at the door, and obeys her "Come in," to inquire whether she may bring a cup of tea.

No, Fadette wants nothing—only perfect quiet. Thank her Miss Mary, and say good-night to her, and to Miss Randolph. She can see no one to-night. And please send up her old Mammy immediately.

Fadette recommenced her aimless wandering about the room, drawing back the lace curtains, restlessly arranging and rearranging the trinkets upon the dressing-table, and at last, with a hasty movement, overturning the whole flowery fabric of a bouquet that morning sent her.

She was down on her knees before the wardrobe, dragging forth cloaks and mantles and shawls, with which the floor was strewn, when the door opened to admit her "old Mammy"—a short, dumpy, cheery mulatto, in bright linsey and gay head-handkerchief.

"Absolutely not one fit to wear," muttered Fadette, tossing a cashmere wrathfully from the now empty drawer.

"Why, honey, whatever you a doing to your pretty shawl? Is the misery in your head so bad?" ejaculated the new-comer, standing aghast with uplifted hands, and evidently referring all this disorder to cerebral confusion. "There, there now, come and lie down then like a good child, while I go make you some yerb tea that'll bring you round in three shakes of a sheep's tail."

Fadette rose up, smiling faintly—

"No, Mammy, your yerb tea won't help me just now. It is not only my head. But this you can do for me—go get your every-day shawl and your big worsted, the new one, and come back just as fast as ever you can. Don't tell any one I sent you."

"But, honey, there's blankets a plenty for this warm night, and—"

"I'll hear about the blankets when you come back, Mammy. Now go."

On her reappearance, Fadette took the "big worsted" from her arm, and folded it over her own head in such a manner that it enveloped her almost to the feet.

She stood before the Psyche-glass, surveying herself, well-pleased. Then she turned to her servant:

"Mammy," she said gayly, "would you swear it wasn't you, if you met it in the dark?"

"Why, honey, you ain't never gwine out that a way!"

"Precisely. You put on the other shawl. Quick!"

She hesitated. Suddenly a thought struck her. She asked anxiously:

"You ain't never after meeting that ugly man as comes a courting you with flowers and sich foolishness? You ain't gwine for to offerize yourself to run away from Mars' Lloyd, and him in jail?"

Fadette laughed.

"No indeed, Mammy, I am not going to do all that. I am only going a square or two, as far as the Monument, to meet a gentleman who has news of your Mars' Lloyd. But we must not let any one know, lest the Yankees hear it. I am only trusting you. You will go now, won't you?"

When Fadette had lowered her light, and locked her door upon the outside, the two cautiously descended the stairs and passed out at the hall-door;—an irregular proceeding on the part of servants, the latter, at which the lady mistress would have been properly horrified. But Fadette was in no mood to concern herself with aught but the shortest mode of egress.

She had little more than a square to traverse, and that was accomplished with so swift a step, that her attendant had much ado to keep pace.

It was quite dark as she paused beneath a lamp-post,

and, covertly consulting her watch, saw that it was a full quarter past eight.

Along the opposite sidewalk wavered a slender stream of passengers, and now and then went by a carriage or two. But here, upon the Monument side, was no one save Fadette and her servant.

Hardly, however, had she withdrawn into the friendly shadow the Monument extended, when a man crossed the street, and standing where she had stood, drew forth his watch. The gaslight streamed full upon his Federal uniform.

Glancing around as if in search of some one, he was passing Fadette.

She feared to trust to the cursory view she had caught of his face, to identify her mysterious follower of the morning. She resolved to test him before disclosing herself.

"Sir," she said, advancing with unassumed timidity, "have you seen any thing of a parasol dropped near here?"

He stopped, and looked at her earnestly.

"It is you, then," he said, bowing low. "But whom have you there—one you can trust?"

"Oh, yes. But—Mammy," she added, "remain here. I am not going out of sight, only to yonder tree, while this gentlemen speaks to me."

Beneath the shade they paused, confronting one another. Fadette raised her eyes inquiringly.

"You will not, I trust, deem me impertinent in requesting this interview," he said, "when I explain the danger in which I stand. I escaped last evening from Fort McHenry, and—"

"With Mr. Randolph?" she interrupted.

He glanced at her in surprise.

"Mr. Randolph is still there. But what is the matter?"

he asked anxiously, as she leaned against the tree, covering her face with her hands.

"Nothing—nothing—go on," she said impatiently. "Go on. Tell me of him."

"Mr. Randolph and I have been for several days fellow-prisoners," he resumed, when she had again signed to him to do so. "We were soon friends, and I confided to him that I am the bearer of secret and important information to the Confederate army in Virginia. Detention of a few weeks would render my information unavailing, and I spoke of my great anxiety. He immediately offered a way of escape, if I were adventurous enough to hazard it. Most gratefully did I accept the offer, and am here."

"And that way?" was the eager questioning of eyes and lips.

"Next day he gave into my possession the uniform I now wear—procured, doubtless, by bribery of the guard. He would, very prudently, enter into no explanation upon the subject."

A violent start, and the hands clenched over her face. A quick passing shiver shook her; but he saw nothing, drawing forth a pocket-book, and intent on searching among the letters in it in the uncertain light.

"Go on, go on; tell me of the escape—your escape he planned—I will have all, all," she cried, imperiously, in the silence.

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, but obeyed.

"Last evening, just after retreat, before the prisoners were locked in for the night, I donned this livery, and when the sentinel's back was turned, made my exit from the prison-door, and strolled leisurely up the ramp to the parapet. Once there, I had but to select a solitary part of the wall and my lightning-rod, and there I was, making the circuit of the camp pitched upon the south side of the

fort, as unmistakable a defender of the Union as any there. Ere long the hue-and-cry after the escaped prisoner was raised, and the supernumerary volunteer took to the water, standing for hours chin-deep, diving down when boats out in search occasionally approached. However, after various adventures by flood and field, I reached Baltimore. This morning I introduced myself to a group of comrade blue-coats in front of Barnum's, and learned the sequel so far as the fort was concerned. But a short while elapsed before an officer passed by our guard-room, and perceiving from light streaming through that the door was ajar, ordered the sentinel to close it. The fellow opened first, and seeing but one prisoner within, stood there asking questions, to which Mr. Randolph replied in such a manner as to detain him as long as possible. Thus some moments were gained before the officer peremptorily demanded the subject under discussion. And by those moments I was saved. Words can never measure my debt of gratitude to Mr. Randolph."

He ended. Fadette's face was still concealed. She murmured, brokenly—

"God forgive you; I cannot. You have taken away the escape I planned for him."

"Great Heaven—for him!—is that possible?" he stammered.

"It is true," she replied, coldly.

"At least do me the justice to believe," he said, after a short silence, "that through ignorance I have done this. I, fool that I was, imagined him wanting in the hardihood needful to such an attempt. I go this instant to deliver myself up to the authorities. Perhaps they may then be generous enough to release him."

"Stay," she cried, as he turned away; "for Heaven's sake do nothing so rash. I was unjust. A proper plea for

his release, truly, that he assisted the escape of another prisoner! Remember your despatches, your duty, you and his country. Mr. Randolph is right, and I was wrong. I, who best know him, know he would not easily forgive me, should words of mine occasion your return. I will not leave you without your promise to continue to Virginia. Do not look as if you felt any gratitude to *me*. With all my heart, aye, with all my soul, I would you were in any dungeon, and he stood free where now you stand. But being here, you are not your own—you hold a place, however insignificant, in the gap. When were you to leave Baltimore?"

And did she mean to march him on in Falstaff's ranks? "Tut, tut, good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better," he muttered between his teeth.

But the smile at her imperiousness was stayed upon his lip by the restless anguish of her eyes. He simply replied: "To-night."

"Promise, then. Nay, you must, you must. He will else be so grieved with me!" In her impatience she wrung her hands.

And the promise was given. For he felt he was not now free to follow the dictates of generosity; and that her argument, however unflattering in terms, was nevertheless a true one.

"And is this all?" she asked, again adjusting the shawl which in her excitement had fallen from her shoulders.

He glanced admiringly down upon the fairy who thus assumed all Queen Mab's sovereign mien. He lost, for a moment, the sensation of his own almost remorseful pain, in the view of those dark, bright eyes, flashing upon him involuntarily; of the red lips, which scarcely quivered out

of their curve of angry scorn; of the wondrously tiny dimpled hand, which now drew closer those uglier than ever woollen folds.

"I was bidden," he said, "to give you the minutiae of the escape, which were of his planning, I being a stranger to the vicinity; and to place in your own hands this letter. Hearing you accosted by name, this morning, in the street, I followed, thinking in this way to arrange an interview with greater security to both. I beg your pardon for the annoyance I occasioned."

Coldly but gracefully she said farewell, and would have parted thus. But he detained her, saying:

"Permit me to give my name, that hereafter when we meet, you may know me no impostor. I am—"

"No, no," she interrupted, "that meeting is far from probable: but if it should ever be, why embitter it by this remembrance? Pardon me—I know it is unjust."

He bowed low, leaving her without another word; and recrossing the street, he was soon lost to Fadette's sight, although he guarded her at a distance until she reached the house.

"A letter from Mars' Lloyd, Mammy," she said, displaying the treasured paper to her faithful servant as they hastened homeward. "I have not read it yet, but he is well. That gentleman was in prison with him, and your master assisted him to escape."

"He oughtn't to a'sisted nobody. He ought to a come himself," Mammy exclaimed, resentfully.

"No. It was good and great in him. I love him for it. Now remember, this is a secret all between our two selves," she reminded, as they slipped in at the alley-gate and round to the now deserted kitchen department, whence Fadette gained her chamber unobserved.

The door secured, she drew a low chair beneath the light,

and impatiently dashing away the long pent-up tears, unfolded her guardian's missive.

She started, on perceiving that it was in her own handwriting. She examined it closely. Yes, there were flower-stains upon the paper, and it bore marks of having been crumpled up in a bouquet. Thus ran the note:

"I have told you to study the language of flowers. These say: 'In the bottom of the portmanteau, beneath the third brass nail on the left as you open, is a secret spring. Press this firmly: the bottom is false, and you will find beneath, a Yankee uniform. It is a friend in need, by which I pray you will escape. Perhaps I should send the uniform of a Confederate soldier instead. Stanch Baltimore has not made a renegade of me—I only desist for important reasons. Don't be disappointed, time will rectify that. I will remain in Baltimore, with Aunt Randolph, until I hear. I look for you daily.'"

As she scrutinized it, at a loss for her guardian's meaning, she observed that beneath some words were indentations, as though purposely marked.

And dropping all save the underlined words, she readily construed his message:

"Beneath a Yankee uniform, a friend I pray will escape—a Confederate soldier instead of me, for important reasons. Don't be disappointed, time will rectify. Remain in Baltimore with Aunt Randolph. I look for you daily."



CHAPTER V.

CAPTURE OF THE ST. NICHOLAS.

"Courage," he said, and pointed toward the land,
"This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."

TENNYSON.

THERE we are at last, *grâce au cocher!*" cried Fadette, putting her head out of the window as the carriage drove on through Light-street to the wharf. "Only just in time, too, for there is the St. Nicholas puffing and blowing in most unsaintly impatience to be gone."

And so was every one else, apparently. Passengers, freight, luggage, scattered together in elaborate confusion. People seemed to possess, indeed, a single eye, and that bent unmovedly upon one trunk, or collection of trunks, to the overlooking of all intervening heads, backs, or ambulatory mediums.

"Do look at that fussy woman," whispered Fadette to her friend Carrie, when they stood together on the guards, Miss Randolph having retired into the cabin with a "dear familiar friend" of her own. "Just hear her, still *à propos* of that everlasting pink silk bonnet. I do believe she takes dapper old Mr. Norton for a man-milliner. Only listen: '*de Paris*'—'*me sied à merveille*'—'*au désespoir* if it be loss.' I should like to see her in it. She might, with her stature, be a grenadier in petticoats, were it not for the inimitable French-ladyhood perceptible in every movement. See, what would you not give for that unlearnable, un-

translatable shrug? And what a handsome foot!" she added, as the object of her remarks passed leisurely into the ladies' cabin, raising her dress to shake off a wisp of straw thereto adhering, or to display the foot in its delicate French boot.

"What a number of workmen!" cried Carrie, the coquetish eye-glass she affected levelled toward the wharf. "Where on earth can they all be going?"

"To work on the Rip Raps, probably. I hear it is to be completed with desperate energy. Or, perhaps, to erect a Bastille for our accommodation on the Eastern shore. Why, there are two parties, are there not? each regarding the other somewhat jealously, methinks. But no, the last is not embarking. Confusion in the building of Babel!"

Now the boat pushed off, and the girls took their seats on the guards. Carrie, lounging on her bench, was soon deep in the pages of a new novel, now and then looking up to yawn, or to stretch out her hand lazily for the paper of bonbons lying on Fadette's lap.

Fadette's book lay with the leaves yet uncut. Her arm rested on the railing, her eyes wandered over the green waters, which the breeze was now cresting with white, to the verdant slopes beyond, where rose the yellow walls of Fort McHenry. Above them waved the stars and stripes, and upon the parade-ground she could see squads of recruits drilling, while strains of martial music wafted faintly on. She set her teeth and drew a hard breath, as she thought of the dungeon within, whence her guardian had but yesterday been removed, only to exchange it for the dreaded Fort Lafayette. Since she could see him no more, she had yielded to much urging, and was now bound, with Carrie and Miss Randolph, on a visit to a gay and hospitable country-house in Somerset.

She was roused from meditations sad and hopeful by the

approach of two of those workmen upon whose advent she and Carrie had commented. Probably they would have drawn no further attention as they passed her by, save that one of them seated himself straightway on the bench close beside Carrie.

He was a weather-beaten, roughly attired stripling, his general air of swaggering rowdyhood certainly not diminished by a flaming bandana, disposed bandage-wise over one eye, and a cap slouched very much over the other. He deposited his pickaxe against the bench between Carrie and himself, with the manner of one who has found a haven of comfort, and does not mean to desert it.

His companion had moved to a distance, and stood leaning on the railing, watching the spray-eddies as they dashed up from the wheel, and then smoothed out in long lines in its wake. He also was in laborer's dress, and bore slung across his shoulder a sack of tools. But Fadette's was not so cursory a view here. There was that in the thoughtful attitude of the bowed head, in the careless easy pose of the powerful figure, which prolonged it. Now he turned, looking over his shoulder at his comrade, with a half-smile. Fadette, thus meeting the full face, was struck with a quick sense of recognition. But in a moment she had argued it away. That bushy beard, and the shock of auburn-red hair, were too noticeable for a remembrance so vague. Even as she thought this, a change in his position brought a pair of deep blue eyes full upon her. With them flashed back her first impression. Confused, she knew not why, she opened her book hastily. She read on for a few paragraphs, and had already lost herself in the story, when a movement from her friend aroused her. And even as she raised her head, she met those deep eyes again, fixed on her with a strange intensity, yet not with the rudeness of a stare.

Annoyed, and still more annoyed with herself for coloring so hotly, she half rose, with an appealing glance to her friend.

Meantime, Carrie, without lifting her eyes from the page, had withdrawn herself slightly from the juxtaposition of him of the pickaxe. But he was not thus to be distanced. He bent forward, resting two brown hands on his knees, and deliberately peered round the modishly-large bonnet at the pretty blooming face within. That face was still very unconsciously bent over the book; for the seat was a pleasant one, and its possessor had not the faintest idea of exchanging it for the close ladies' cabin, whence screaming children proclaimed infant minstrelsy itinerant,—auditors admitted at the expense of their equanimity. O that Vox Populi!

“By George! *She* ain't a Plug-Ugly—not she!” Carrie's neighbor cried out to his companion, with an approving nod toward her.

“Faith, I do believe she's a Blood-Tub,” he added, as the subject of his remarks, reddening with anger, arose. Drawing her shawl around her, she swept away to the cabin, followed by Fadette, who could not restrain a ringing laugh at her friend's indignant denunciation of “our absurd Baltimore political sobriquets—“Blood-Tub, indeed!”

Yes, the cabin was heated—was squally, as tempests increase in torrid atmospheres. But there was no help for it, and the girls quietly resigned themselves to their fate, Carrie ensconcing herself on a sofa for a long nap, and Fadette opening her neglected book.

The French lady formed the centre of quite a host of anxious matrons. This one's cherub was teething—Rosebud or Lily was a victim to convulsions—and Madame's *petit ange*, *l'aîné*, or *la cadette*, had passed through all—

this or that simple *remède innocent, tout innocent, lui a sauvé*, what is dat you call—de life?

Time passed on. Fadette lingered in the "Red Deeps" with Maggie Tulliver and Philip, and Carrie soundly slumbered in the red deeps of her sofa.

Time passed on, it is true. But Fadette thought him quite at a stand-still, and growing very weary of her close precincts, went to the door to reconnoitre.

The guards were deserted, and she drew a stool to the railing, toward the further end, where an awning had fallen from its fastenings at one side, and now, as she took her seat behind, drooped, completely concealing her.

Engrossed in her book, she read on without lifting her head, or rustling her covert by a movement.

No one was there to break upon her solitude; and when at last she heard approaching steps, the new-comers were concealed from her, and she felt secure from observation. The awning closed out the view like a white wall, and for some time she read on, taking no heed, and distinguishing only a murmur of deep-toned voices; when suddenly, in a momentary lulling of the breeze, while the waves hushed, and the flapping sail-cloth hung down motionless, two words aroused her into attention:

"—— captured saint."

"Aye," responded the other; and on her awakened ear the tones fell with somewhat of a remembered sound—"the hour draws near. We must strike successfully, for, be the achievement in itself great or small, it is the initial effort of more than one of your gallant young Baltimoreans, and '*à barbe de fol on apprend à raire.*'"

Fadette started. And in that start, her book fell from her knee with a distinct crash.

She had no time to collect her scattered ideas, and to calm the vague terror which had seized upon her in those

mysterious words. For even as one of her unseen neighbors uttered a hasty exclamation, the other had drawn aside the awning, and now confronted her with presented pistol.

But he dropped the muzzle on the instant, and his stern-set mouth relaxed into a smile.

With a rapid apology to Fadette, he turned to his companion, the hedger and ditcher, for whose edification he had quoted the French proverb.

"We are safe with this young lady. She is not unknown to me," he said.

Fadette looked up hurriedly as his comrade bowed and moved away. She had not been wrong, then, in her impression. For he who stood before her was the man whose glance and whose voice had thrilled her with that indefinable remembrance.

But he was apparently in no haste to substantiate his assertion. He merely remained there with absent gaze fixed upon the waters, until she rose, embarrassed.

"Stay," he said then, detaining her with a gesture, "and let me say how much I am indebted to this dingy old canvas for forming so opportune a screen, thus forcing you to become in a measure one of the conspirators, and enabling me to take you wholly into our confidence. You are astonished? I am not indeed rash enough to proffer this to an entire stranger. We shall presently make ourselves masters of this boat, and run her across to the Virginia shore. That gained, the passengers shall be convoyed safely and speedily back to Maryland. Trust me, there is no cause for fear. Nay, I see you are not thinking of that, with your kindling eyes, your joyfully clasped hands, your half-smile of expectancy. I know well you reckon little of greater risk than this. But I rely upon you now to withdraw quietly into the saloon, where the ending of the plot will make itself manifest before the beginning."

She thanked him eagerly, as he walked with her to the entrance of the saloon. And, compelling herself to tranquillity, she sank back in an easy-chair, hiding her face upon its arm, and tapping with her foot impatiently, as she counted the slow, slow minutes, until a sudden tumult without hurried her to the door.

Thither rushed all the womankind; but the French lady was nowhere to be seen. She was to be heard of, however; and astonishment among all, delight among the many, dismay among the few, followed upon the hearing.

The officers of the boat had been relieved from their arduous duties: the boat was in the hands of a party of Southerners—mechanics—and the quondam French lady, the gallant and daring Zarvona, at their head.

The St. Nicholas speedily made for the Virginia shore. The French lady was the centre of attraction, when Fardette withdrew from the animated circle.

She was looking wistfully toward the banks, which neared, moment by moment, and indulging in a feminine longing that the trunk wherewith she had set out for Somerset could, by some means, be transformed into that vast "Noah's ark," without which a sojourn in Dixie was not to be thought of; but with which she vaguely speculated she might possibly have won her way to Charleston in defiance of withholden passport. Her abstraction was broken in upon by an approaching step, and glancing up, she recognized her self-styled friend the mechanic.

He leaned beside her on the railing, watching the shores, where sands and woodlands now marked the margin of the crested waves; but when he entered into conversation, it was only as any of his comrades might have done, while etiquette was lost sight of in the excitement of strange incident and community of sympathies. He made no reference to that claim of old acquaintance; but appeared con-

tent that the new was being established on quite a friendly footing. And ere Miss Randolph presently beckoned her apart, Fadette had confided to him her southward journey in prospect, and he, as they parted, held out his hand in a matter-of-course manner, with the assurance that in Dixie they would meet again. It had seemed, at the moment, also a matter of course that she should yield her hand, although in the next instant her color rose. But embarrassment was forgotten in merry laughter when she reached Miss Randolph's side.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" that lady whispered, with a horrified countenance. "To think of my having told her—him—of my wearing all last winter a strengthening-plaster on the small of my back!"

Carrie laid her dainty gloved hand upon the fustian sleeve of the hero of the pickaxe.

"To think," she cried, "of this ne'er-do-weel brother of mine calling me a Blood-Tub!"





CHAPTER VI.

UNDERGROUND RAILWAY.

"Oh the birds, the trees, the ruddy
And white blossoms sleek with rain!
Oh my garden rich with pansies!
Oh my childhood's bright romances!
All revive . . .
And I see them stir again!"

MRS. BROWNING.

BRIGHTLY shone the October evening sun over broad-leaved undulating tobacco-fields, and aslant through shadowing trees and tall hedgerows, when along an unfrequented by-road passed a light spring-wagon. Its occupants, besides a trio of struggling chickens, a hamper of eggs, and basket heaped with luscious white October peaches, were a stout, ruddy, brown-visaged young countryman, and apparently Joan, his small wife, sunburnt and smiling, within immense beruffled sun-bonnet.

On trotted the strong-built bay, faster and faster, at the reminder of whip and rein, while the two sat together on the broad seat in front, and chatted in low tones.

"To Nanjemoy? how far did you say?" was Madam Joan's question.

"Oh, not more than four or five miles now. You are not tired?"

"Have you forgot my ancient powers of endurance?"

"When we used to rove all Calvert through on black-berry raids, and march home at sunset, you with your

apron, I with my roundabout, deeply dyed in the blood of the slain—standing repentant but happy in the library doorway; while our Mentor would look up from his easy-chair, and lay aside his book, and shake his head with scarcely successful gravity, we solemnly vowing to do so ‘never no more’—until next Saturday.”

The smile vanished from her lip, and she fixed her eyes gravely on him, as she asked :

“What, think you, would he say to this escapade of mine? Oh, I am so sorry I started! I’ve a great mind to stop at Nanjemoy, and get Mrs. Leigh to send me home again.”

He looked at her quickly. He leaned forward and gave the horse a sudden lash, which made him bound off. Then checking him with a jerk, he turned again, flushed, to his companion.

“What, after all your persuasions to my aunt—all your arguments to convince her that you were right, and then to return, thereby convicting yourself of headstrong folly! And your trunks already at Nanjemoy!”

“More headstrong to go on than to go back, if there be folly in the question.”

“What nonsense!” he cried, angrily. “As if my brother could object, when it was at his instance that you have applied again and again for a pass to go where you may be to-morrow, without waiting for that which, ten chances to one, may not be granted. What is it, after all, but a friend to visit, a river to cross?—and lo! we are in Dixie.”

“But the Potomac is no brook over which you can carry me safely, as when we were children. And its Virginia shores are not South Carolina.”

“True, O most learned Geographess. And therefore the pleasanter jaunt we shall have, even unto the shores of South Carolina.”

She smiled dubiously, objecting—

“But the Yankees?”

“Not the sign of one in our zodiac. Besides, who would think of interfering with two staid country-folk such as we—*bona fide* clod-hopper and shepherdess?”

“Shade of Watteau forbid! But it is astonishing how a little brown wash metamorphoses you.”

“I do not find the change in you so amaz—”

“Hold your peace, Impertinence, or I assume rustic manners to match my rustic garb, and bestow upon your ears a reminder that ‘neat-handed Phyllis’ is not light-handed as the Lady Dulcinea.”

The straggling hedgerows lengthen, and the dusky harvesters, in bordering fields, begin to cease from their labors. Only that wood at yonder bend in the road hides Nanjemoy, and the white walls are asserting themselves through every wavering shadow. And there is a silvery glimpse of the Potomac. The bay is going over the ground in gallant style, when suddenly—

“Halt!”

And at the challenge, from the covert of low-sweeping trees and thicket shielding from view that abrupt angle, half a dozen soldiers of a picket-camp started up from their full-length card-playing on the sward.

Bumpkin has considerable difficulty in reining in his steed, accomplishes it at last with unsteady hand, and reels slightly toward his companion, to whom he contrives to whisper:

“Never fear—they’ll release us in a few minutes. Fine flow of spirits—returning from family dinner at grandma’s—Widow Hawkins’s, you know. Going ten miles the other side of Nanjemoy—my wife.”

And with ludicrous attempts at distinct utterance, he

replied to the questions of the guard, according to the synopsis contained in his aside, adding :

"Yes, Grandma Hawkins's is the best cider in the Union—and maybe I've a leetle, just a leetle drop too much aboard"—sinking his voice and flourishing the whip about his head. "But I tell you what it is—I'm going to get on a big drunk to-morrow. Bully whiskey at Nanjemoy, boys—treat all round—take oath, hey?—Union forever! 'Hang Johnny Reb on a sour apple-tree'—Hooray! Only"—and he caught the corporal by the confidential button—"only don't tell the old woman, boys—don't tell the old woman. She's a stunner, she is, when a'nfortunate fellow's shot in the neck." And he indicated the old woman by a gesture of the thumb over his shoulder.

At first as pale as sun-browned tints of complexion would permit, she now scrutinized, though with apparent carelessness, the countenances of these blockaders on the "Underground" passage, who had gathered round the wagon. There was assuredly no great cause for alarm in their idle curiosity breaking the tedium of a long October afternoon. Such an interruption, demanding just so much exertion as the stretching of lazy limbs, was provocative rather of good-humor. So she composedly smoothed down her white apron over the shining black silk, with somewhat of a coquettish air, asking :

"May we go on now, please sir? Me and Thomas 's been rather late upon the start, and we left the house at home all alone."

"Sorry, Marm, but you'll hev to wait till the officer of the guard comes round. Them's our orders. Calc'late the house wunt git lonesome."

"How long must we wait?" she inquired, with a shade of anxiety in her tone.

"Dunno. 'Bout long enough for us to help you with them beautiful peaches, that'll all spile by keeping. Was you bringing 'em for us? A big lot, 'most as fine as they grow down East. Nigh onto two months sence we seen one, or any kind o' garden sass. Here, boys, jest smell of 'em." And he distributed the fruit with lavish hand among his comrades, who declared themselves nation tired of hard-tack.

The owners the while reconciled themselves to their fate. The cider began to take more and more visible effect upon Grandma Hawkins's grandson, who waxed garrulous under its influence. And disregarding the scornful withdrawal and the uplifted chin of his indignant spouse, he confided to a select audience that the aforesaid interesting old relative had, besides very fine cider, not a little store of "tin," which one day would fall to the share of his old woman, thus quite a "spec." And in confidentially low tones, and slightly differing terms, he insinuated that rather the "*beaux yeux de sa cassette*" than her own, had made Benedick a married man. Between every sentence he would fumble in his pockets, and extracting with difficulty therefrom what he called A, No. 1, tobacco, sometimes made pressing offers of it to the soldiers, engrossed by the peaches—but invariably transferred it to his own mouth without awaiting their acceptance. Though occasionally the expression of his face might seem to imply that A, No. 1, was not entirely to his taste.

Twilight was falling before the anxiously expected officer made his appearance. Then, after questioning the two staid country-people, examining the man's pockets, and finding nothing unusual within, he decided to let them pass.

And now the moonlight, which had shown full upon the broad river, began to creep in uncertain trembling rays through rustling embrowning autumn foliage. The way-

farers dashed through the gates of a country-seat, and up the straight over-arched avenue leading onward to the portico of a heavy-built square mansion of age-darkened moss-grown brick, in the midst of the dense oak-grove.

The servant, answering a thundering rap of the knocker, eyed askance the man stamping his heavy boots upon the edge of the marble steps, and the sun-bonneted woman still keeping her seat in the wagon. But long-accustomed exercise of hospitality, which an old family servant deems as much his own as his master's, induced the negro politely to invite even these non-"quality folks" to enter.

"Have a care, these are not exactly clod-hopper manners," the woman whispered, as her companion returned to the wagon and assisted her therefrom. "No, indeed, I won't take your arm; but you may give it instead to this basket of eggs. Mercy! the chickens are gone! Grandma Hawkins's fattest! Come," and she mounted the steps and followed the servant into the hall, whence he went to inform Mrs. Leigh of the arrival.

The piano suddenly stopped in the adjacent drawing-room, the door was thrown open, and a young lady stood on the threshold. She advanced, hastily, crying:

"Ah, here you are at last! I've been looking—"

There she stopped. Her eyes became accustomed to the glare of the well-lighted hall, and she descried a sun-bonneted, white-aproned figure balanced on the edge of a chair, with a large basket on her knee. A man stood in the centre of the floor, his hands in his pockets, apparently engrossed in the examination of the chandelier. He wheeled round at the sound of a voice, and, removing his hat, explained, in gruff tones, that he and his wife there had been stopped by a set of Yankee pickets on the way home through Nanjemoy. They could not go back all the way they came, as a good piece of the road lay through the

woods, and the moon wa'n't an hour high. Might they make free to ask lodging here?

"Certainly," the young lady had replied, when a second thought struck her, and she added, hesitatingly, "Wait, I'll ask."

The white-aproned figure set down her basket, rose with great deliberation, and then making a sudden dart upon the young lady, seized and kissed her, holding her in her arms. She, too terrified to find voice for a scream, struggled violently the while.

"Why, Carrie, are you blind, are you deaf, that you do not know us?"

And her companion advanced, extending his hand, as he said :

"Can Miss Carrie have forgotten her old friend Lionel Randolph? Let me, then, introduce her most obedient, Thomas Brown by name."

"Never, never," exclaimed the now laughing Carrie, "will I trust my sight again. I was on the eve of sending Thomas Brown about his business, for the greater security of Mr. Lionel Randolph. A sorry welcome would you two have received for sailing into a friendly port under false colors."

"But those false colors are rendered necessary by the presence of the enemy near port. We were in reality stopped by a picket. Therefore, if Miss Carrie object not, she will entertain this evening Thomas Brown and—"

"Sister. I decline the honor of your hand," Fadette interrupted, gayly.

Carrie put up her eyeglass, and affected to examine them critically, walking round them for that purpose.

"Quite a respectable-looking couple," was the conclusion to which she arrived. "I think you may be invited into the drawing-room, and allowed to take tea with us. Will

you leave your basket there, Miss Brown? The servant shall put it safely away for you. Just lay your bonnet and shawl upon the table, if you please."

"Ah, this is really charming," cried Carrie, as after tea a cheerful quartette readjourned to the drawing-room, secure from all intrusion, even of faithful, but, perhaps, indiscreet servants, who had betaken themselves to their several cabins. "Is it not like a reunion in the good old times, mamma?"

"Save two absent ones, my child," replied the placid old lady from her armchair, wheeled close before the hearth, where a wood-fire blazed cheerily away.

Lionel Randolph's bright brown eyes clouded, and for a moment he lost the pleasing consciousness of that heavy, suddenly-acquired black moustache, which covered his own faint suggestion of the same.

"No reunion of the good old times, Miss Carrie," he responded sadly, "while your brother and mine are missing—one in a Northern dungeon, one in a distant camp. But we will not compare with the past. Have you no curiosity with regard to Thomas Brown's adventures?" he asked, with wonted gayety.

"*Au contraire*, I am dying to hear them. From Alpha to Omega, please."

He did not please, however, it appeared, but inquired, instead:

"Did you ever eat your own words, Mademoiselle?"

"Never, Monsieur; but could not have the slightest objection—always make them palatable and sweet—like these, for instance." And lifting a box of bonbons from the centre-table, at which she sat with her embroidery, industriously idling, she offered them with a profound obeisance.

"Can you recommend them as an antidote to very naughty words? I observe you are always supplied. I ask in all seriousness, because I this evening swallowed a quire of just such words. If 'rebellion' be sin, then is it well no man is judged by that which entereth into him."

"What do you mean?" asked the mystified Carrie.

Fadette stared, but in a moment laughed merrily.

"That explains," she cried, "why you began chewing tobacco so indefatigably, while the picket detained us the other side of Nanjemoy. I supposed it *en règle* for Thomas Brown, and was revolving in my own mind whether Mistress Brown was leaving any similar duty unperformed."

"Alas, no! All the fortifications around Washington are eaten—nothing left for 'the cankered tooth of Time'—and their garrisons perished in the *débris*. I can now imagine how Mother Earth feels after the repast consequent upon a battle."

"But you surely have not lost the results of your fortnight's dangerous sojourn in Washington?" inquired Mrs. Leigh, grave and anxious amid the laughter and the railery which followed.

"No, madam; only rough notes I was so careless as to leave in my pockets, dreaming not of foes about peaceful old Nanjemoy. The papers of importance could not readily be found."

Through all the merry conversation of that evening, two voices had been ringing ceaseless changes in Fadette's ears, and she now stole apart, throwing open the window and passing out upon the portico, to listen to and to decide between them. She stood there against the balustrade, looking upward through brown clashing boughs to the starlit skies. The ripple of the mighty river, glancing and darkling through vistas in the grove, and distant only by that grove, and the white winding road, seen at inter-

vals beyond, flowed in, soothingly, with the current of her thoughts, until tumultuous wilfulness died away in the tranquillity, and left her free to hear the whisper of conscience, reminding that her guardian had bade her home to Randolph Honor, not on this hare-brained expedition with young Lionel.

"The moon is down," she called, rousing herself. "Lionel, ought you to delay?"

He went out to her.

"Are you ready, dearest, and not afraid?"

"Not afraid; but—I am not going."

She spoke with quiet determination, although tears glistened on the lifted lashes: He looked long into her face, which met that look steadfastly, though sorrowfully. And then he turned sharply from her, and began striding up and down the portico in silence.

She kept her place, humming in careless fashion a lively air, and tapping the time with her fingers upon the balustrade, while in the effort to keep back fast-welling drops, her eyes fixed themselves, strainingly, on one small star aloft, across which that high bough swept with tedious regularity. Yet the notes quavered when he again passed her by abruptly; and presently she followed, and touched his arm.

"Don't be angry with me," she pleaded. "It is because I feel I ought not. You cannot tell how it grieves me to give it up. I have been thinking and thinking ever since I first spoke of it this evening, though I would not let you say another word. And now I know Mr. Randolph would never consent to this."

"Is 'Mr. Randolph' always to be first?" he demanded, sullenly, shaking off her light clasp.

"There, now, you are behaving like a silly boy, and an unjust one. I put myself under the care of no such mad-

cap Hotspur. Of course Mr. Randolph is to be first in all matters of right and wrong. As to affection—”

She walked away from him quite to the further end of the piazza. The trees gloomed densely there, so that he could not see her face when he had followed. But he heard something very like a stifled sob.

It did not soften him. It gave him the sense of power—a new sense, where she was concerned. And the touch he laid upon her shoulder was of command, rather than entreaty.

“Unsay your words, Fadette, or say them again with a deeper meaning. Do you scorn me? do you rebuff me? Will you never put yourself under my care, Hotspur though I be? Fadette, this brother-and-sister farce must end. You are no sister of mine. I love you as a man should love his bride, and I want a bride’s answer. Speak!”

She moved so that the light which glinted through the curtains from the open window fell full upon her face. Through her April tears broke sun-bright flashing smiles, and she raised her finger chidingly.

“Stay, you are not commanding your company, that you should issue orders in that style. I shall not answer one question you have put. But you may say—‘Fadette, I—care for you—something more than a brother—will you like me just a very little?’”

Downcast and embarrassed, he stood before her. He felt himself utterly powerless beneath those bright eyes. The fairy-queen tyranny which had bent him from boyhood to its sway, was not all melted away in those tear-drops.

His gaze was lowered, as he said: -

“Long and truly have I loved you—you, and none other. Is all in vain?”

She laid her hand in his, extended towards her.

“I—I think—I am sure,” she said softly, “that I love

you better than any one in the world—yes, even than Mr. Randolph,” she added, as if in answer to some questioning thought. “And—don’t you know I used to be your little wife, dear Lionel?”

At that instant the curtains were drawn back, and Carrie’s gay voice cried—

“Oyez, oyez! Mr. Thomas Brown please come forward with his wife! Mamma says you positively must go. Is she not hospitable!”

Fadette had disengaged herself from her lover’s arm at the first word, and hurriedly obeyed the summons.

“You will surely go now? You cannot part my Fadette—my own Fadette—from me so soon?” Lionel whispered imploringly.

She made no answer.

“I have decided not to go,” she said on re-entering the drawing-room. “Am I not right, Mrs. Leigh?”

“What!” exclaimed Carrie, after a long, wondering stare—“You give up! Terra firma is no more! But I perceive mamma is going to side with you. And, indeed, Mr. Randolph himself looks well satisfied! Are you quite sure you did not consider her rather a bore?” she asked of him in a playfully confidential tone.

“She has satisfied me,” he replied, glancing slightly toward Fadette, whose color rose.

He was leaning against the mantel, before the sofa, where Fadette and Carrie had sunk down side by side. He was twirling his coarse country straw-hat slowly and lingeringly in his hands. At length he broke the silence:

“Young ladies, are you occupying these last moments in reflection upon what a hazardous journey is mine? Do you realize that amidst those imminent perils by flood, highway, by-way, and field, there is the dread possibility, not to say probability, that I may lose—”

He paused. Fadette's color fled, and her lips parted almost with a gasp. Mrs. Leigh, from her armchair, shook her head with unconscious foreboding.

Carrie drew down the corners of her mouth, in a vain endeavor to hide a lurking smile.

"The dread possibility," he reiterated solemnly, "that I may lose—two small valuables I would not willingly dedicate to the adorning of some future victorious enemy. How shall I therefore rescue them?"

While he was speaking, he had brought forth his watch, and detached from the chain its one charm, an exquisitely enamelled acorn. Springing open, it disclosed a tiny golden-winged imprisoned dryad, balancing herself on one foot upon a large diamond embedded there. And drawing off a seal-ring which Tom Brown's rough worsted gloves had concealed from view of the picket-guard, he held both in his outstretched palm.

"Will not each of you, young ladies, save one of these from its impending fate, by taking care of it until I come again, to redeem it with the spoils of the Egyptians?"

He watched Fadette uneasily, as Carrie's eyes fixed admiringly upon the priceless bauble.

"I will wear your ugly ring," Fadette said, with well-assumed carelessness. But her glance fell before his of ardent gratitude, and lifted itself no more, while blushing deeply she slipped on the ring, guarding it with her diamond cluster. Mrs. Leigh now spoke, earnestly:

"Indeed, Lionel, you should not delay. The servants are already at the boat—John and Madison, perfectly trustworthy, you know. My dear boy, it is not safe to linger."

He shook hands cordially with her and with her pretty daughter, who partially succeeded in an attempt to look lachrymose, and then he turned to Fadette.

"As my little sister, and as Tom Brown's wife, I claim no more than my dues," he said, and he bent down and kissed her suddenly.

He paused on the threshold, waved his hat, and was gone.





CHAPTER VII.

BY FLAG OF TRUCE.

"To us, us also, open straight;
The outer air is chilly—"

MRS. BROWNING.

HADETTE stands apart on the deck of the *Louisi-ana*, in the early November twilight. She holds, clasped tightly in her hand, a slip of paper, the talisman which is to work the great change in her life—the pass by which, to-morrow, she will enter the magic bounds of the Confederacy.

She watches the stars come out one by one, like the lights in the fading squares of Baltimore. Those squares are clearly defined in glowing lines that sweep down from the amphitheatre of hills, encircling waters where red and golden rays are streaming broadly from vessels riding there at anchor. For the first time a sense of that great change comes over her in all its force, and she starts forward, straining her sight to gain every feature of the fast-receding landscape, as for the last glimpse of a familiar countenance.

She forgets the iron grasp upon "the seven hills of yore;" she sees not the intrenchments of Federal Hill, nor the tents whitening that green promontory of Fort McHenry, nor hears those bugles from the fort sounding retreat. Tears blind her watching eyes, and in her ears yet linger parting words and sighs.

Still before her seems the carriage upon yonder distant wharf, in which Miss Randolph had sunk back, her veil

drawn down. From its window, Carrie's pretty face, a very April day of smiles and tears, had thrust itself, while her handkerchief waved the last farewell.

But a Federal officer saunters near, and thought receives a new impulse. The fetters that day by day clank heavily in the streets of Baltimore,—and the spirit that will not yet be fettered, shall it one day hug those chains?

She calls to mind how, that very evening, driving down Charles-street in the wake of a military procession, she had caught through assembled crowds cheers, “not loud, but deep,” for Davis, for Beauregard, for Dixie. Even the slave was carried away in the popular current; for, as a drunken Zouave staggered past the carriage stopped in the press, and in maudlin tones declared he had lost himself, Fadette heard a spruce young negro mockingly advise him to “find himself pretty quick, or the secesh would.”

Up the street she glances with memory's eye at the shop-windows, which, despite Dix's prohibition of the rebellious colors red, white, and red, yet venture to insinuate their proclivities in the arrangement of candies, ribbons, etc. And further on, where alley-gates appear in dingier localities, “Fort Lafayette,” inscribed in huge black letters upon the darkest and the dingiest walls, proclaims “rebellion” rampant even here.

She thinks of one true heart far away in the real and drearier Lafayette—of the unwearied fingers working, of the unwearied souls praying, for the Southern soldier, for the Southern cause. And she dreams—is it a dream some coming dawn will verify?—these may not have suffered, wrought, and prayed in vain.

In the early dawn she is again there. Randolph Honor has been watched for, and passed in the night; and the darkened, lonely mansion on the wooded promontory

loomed so desolate in the pale light of the moon, that truly it seemed "Randolph Honor no longer." Now, stars are paling above, and beneath, low clouds merge into the faint blue shores. The gray, white-crested bay—the gray, white-crested sky—alike are flushing and glowing moment by moment in the rays of the half-revealed sun, that seems another moon rising in crimson pomp to the throne yonder pale orb abandons.

The freshening breeze blows chill from the ocean. But Fadette heeds not the frosty air. Her heart is beating warm with hope. To-day in the land of promise!

Five o'clock and breakfast. She thinks, as she escapes from the heated saloon, and welcomes the refreshing wind, that nature, in the shape of the adverse currents and chopping waves of the horse-shoe, and art, in the person or persons who ordain breakfast a fixed fact at that particular hour, are deliberate economists at the expense of travellers' appetites.

She stands upon deck, watching for every well-known phase of the changing scene, as Old Point Comfort stretches sandily before her. There are the woodlands whence the Point narrows whitely southward, with blue waters upon either hand. Aye, those sand-hills stretching forth in peaks and ridges from the woods above the Point, wear the old familiar aspect. Only, surely they must have dwindled in height and breadth since those last childish holidays which sped so rapidly among them! She knows where the persimmons hide behind the cedars at the foot of that great one, and on which sunny slope the fox-grapes ripen best. Yonder in their midst, shielded by that tangled copse, lies the soldiers' graveyard, by which she has scampered tremblingly at sunset, dared by her playmates. Beyond is "the dreadful hollow behind the little wood," the barren desolation of which her childish imagination

had invested with a tragic weird of its own. Toward it she bends eagerly, when the steamer passes on, as though she might thus catch a glimpse of waved sands and wave-rounded stones and shells scattered there, the dingier shades of which she had been fain, awestruck, to believe gory stains. She stretches her hands lovingly toward the beach, for she knows what wealth of gold and silver and rainbow-hued shells lie there, the treasure-trove of summer days long past. That black-ringed target is the same, or like the same, at which she has so often watched the firing from the water-battery. And here is the red water-battery itself, guarding the northeast of the fort, facing one side of the broad moat—in familiar parlance, ditch—surrounding in its sweep of a mile the massive octagonal granite walls and grassy parapets of Fortress Monroe, whose casemate embrasures overlook its waters. Dark-slatted roofs of buildings within the ramparts make themselves manifest above, and over the beach the lantern of the white lighthouse blazes in the sunlight. Opposite, the Rip-Raps rises in mid-sea, a tottering fortress on an unseen pile of rocks, through which waves plash and gurgle with the peculiar ripple of its name. Workmen are even at this early hour gathered on the unfinished ramparts of this capture from the sea, and the clashing of their peaceful weapons is echoed clearly here, where the steamer rests now at the wharf at Old Point.

No one is permitted to land. The thirty women, half as many children, and a solitary man bound for Dixie, strive to while away the time; to sleep, to read, to walk, to talk away anxiety, as the weary hours lag until the general commanding shall open his eyes and his mouth, and perhaps accord permission to be gone.

Fadette soon wearied of watching those ragged "intelligent contrabands" transformed into beasts of burden,

chained to heavily-laden sleds upon the wharf. She was saddened by the war-change here apparent in bustle, thronging blue-coats, and din of workmen. Newly-erected buildings crowded into insignificance the few which in the olden time had sufficed for ordnance-stores, upon the gentle slopes stretching away from this beachy southward point to the green bank of the moat. It was yet more sorrowful to linger about that cottage hard by the moat. There the multiflora trailed neglected, and withered from the porch it once had veiled, even to the sloping roof, with mists of pink and white. And its embowered garden, wont to crown in childhood's days the May Queen, now lay straggling, brown, and overgrown with weeds. It was, therefore, rather a relief when the order came to search the luggage, and the manner of execution gave employment in repacking.

That over, she returned to the saloon, for the wind had changed, and the rainy fog it brought rendered the deck no longer a pleasant retreat. She skimmed listlessly over the pages of a novel, but it or she was unpardonably stupid. She tried to talk, but conversation flagged into speculations upon the general's probable decision. She tried to sleep, but those same speculations argued still between dreams and waking thoughts. She longed to silence that whining child; and, finally, to put an end to that odious little whitey-brown deputy provost (she believed he was) lounging against the window opposite, and talking to good-natured, silly Mrs. Lennox, Fadette's chaperon, with so excessively impertinent an air.

Presently that lady crossed to Fadette, and proffered a request in an undertone. Fadette looked rather annoyed, but took out her porte-monnaie and drew from it a slip of paper.

"There it is, Mrs. Lennox," she said, "but I would not;

if I were you, show it to that man. He may be a spy for aught we know, and at all events is very presuming."

"Oh, my dear, that is his ignorance. I only wish to prove to him that Baltimore is not Union, as he says General Dix's policy has made it. Many thanks."

And Mrs. Lennox resumed her sofa, giving the paper into the possession of her controversialist.

As he unfolded it, and read on, a heavy frown settled on his face. For it was a burlesque, printed in red and blue letters, of General Dix's proclamation against the red, white, and red—threatenings of war to the knife on all rose-bushes, unless the wind *blew* them—warnings that those Baltimoreans must *die* whose hair is red, and whose eyes not azure—and other rhymed witticisms, very insignificant in themselves, but so running in with the tide of popular feeling, that these secretly printed effusions were eagerly sought after.

He finished the perusal of the last line; and then he refolded the sheet, and deliberately tore it into fragments, disregarding Mrs. Lennox's exclamation of shocked surprise.

Fadette's eyes flashed, and she lost sight of all prudential considerations. She surveyed the man steadily from head to foot, remarking in a distinct tone, while he rather shrunk than walked away from the many scornful glances levelled on him—

"This is the first time my attention has been especially drawn to that prominent deputy-provost characteristic—petty meanness. I shall know the genus again."

An hour after, a rumor filled the saloon that two among its inmates were to have their persons searched.

Fadette withdrew from the excited groups which congregated here and there, all talking at once in awestruck whispers—every one emphatic in declaring the order could

not concern herself, yet feeling meantime a secret inquietude.

Though she paced up and down the long apartment so tranquilly, Fadette was by no means calm. She clenched her fingers together in striving to maintain some degree of composure, forcing herself to face what was before her. For if Mrs. Lennox's folly and her own imprudence had pointed suspicion to her, how was she to escape? Refuse examination, and thus be refused her passport, she could not, since Randolph Honor was now closed, and Miss Randolph absent. And yet, although she had been wary, a rigid examination might develop certain secrets which, beyond a doubt, would winter her with some rebel sisterhood in prison.

After a time she came to a resolution. And now composed, though the flush of excitement burned on her cheek, she paused in her walk at a window. Here, all this while, a lady with whom Fadette had formed quite a friendship during the journey had stood apart, pale as death, with gaze fixed vacantly on the dismal expanse of leaden skies and waves.

"I believe," said Fadette, "that I am one of the suspected. That paper of mine—what do you think?"

"I fear," she said, with quivering breath, "they may have discovered I was lately sent back from Harper's Ferry, for attempting to smuggle through a small quantity of medicine—I do assure you, only for my family. I will not be searched again—they were no women there that did it—they will have to drag me from here. I have nothing, nothing concealed, but I cannot go through another such scene."

"As for me," replied Fadette, nodding significantly, "I shall go, but I shall know how to protect myself. There are women here, but neither woman nor man shall search

me. However, I shall go with them, and give you the benefit of my experience. Don't look so terrified. I think that is the summons now."

It was, and as Fadette expected. Mrs. Lennox, on hearing Fadette's name called, was distressed and alarmed beyond measure, and would have gone below with her, but Fadette declined, though very kindly, saying that she was not in the least afraid. Indeed, save that her voice rang quicker and more decided, and her color heightened, she was the Fadette of an hour ago.

She followed a soldier down stairs to the cabin door, which he opened and closed again, shutting her in. She leisurely began to unbuckle her belt, while listening to his reascending step and examining her examiner,—a good-humored looking importation, coarse and rough indeed, but, as Fadette judged, rather manageable. So, delaying until a heavy tread overhead informed her that the soldier was quite out of the way, she addressed herself to the woman, who attempted to assist in the intricate question of hooks and eyes.

"That is great waste of time," she said, lightly. "You will be obliged to help me to dress again. Whereas, if you'll only let me alone, and say you found nothing, I'll find twenty dollars in my purse for you."

But she soon saw that bribery was ineffectual here. Native honesty, or fear of detection, prevailed over the offered reward. One way remained.

She slipped her hand in her pocket, and click! went something there. A quick grasp upon the woman's shoulder, a pistol suddenly lifted to her head, brought her down, powerless and speechless with terror, upon her knees.

"Don't dare to open your lips," commanded Fadette, resolutely drawing up her slight figure, and trying to look as if she thought herself very formidable—"Don't attempt

to scream, or you are a dead woman. See, your life is at the mercy of one movement of this finger. What, you will promise any thing now?" She had much ado to preserve that fitting fierce sternness of demeanor, in view of the trembling creature who shrank and cowered at her feet, yet who could have crushed her almost at a grasp, were it not for native cowardice and wholesome awe of that small silver-mounted weapon, which indeed gave the odds into Fadette's firm hand.

"Now remember, if you inform on me, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth—night and day you are not safe—you shall never escape me. There, get up—some one is coming. If it is the guard, you are to say you found nothing. And be sure you are polite to the next lady who comes. Here, don't stand there in the light. You are as white as if the pistol had indeed gone off, and you were your own ghost. This way," and she drew her, perfectly passive with fear, aside where the red curtains reflected some color on her ashen cheek. Then pressing the promised gold in her hand, she withdrew slightly, and was engaged with the fastening of her buckle, when the door opened, and the soldier thrust in his head.

"Got through? Found any thing?" he asked.

Fadette significantly put her hand in her pocket, with a turn of the head toward the woman, who hastened to reply in the negative, in a pretty steady tone. The hand emerged with a kerchief, the soft folds of which were in requisition to conceal a smile.

As Fadette passed her friend in the saloon above, she whispered, nodding triumphantly—

"Go down, you won't have the least trouble. I wish you could have seen my farce below-stairs. Indeed, I enacted the heroine to perfection."

Three o'clock came before the Dixie-bound were transferred from the Louisiana to a rickety old white-flagged ferry-boat, at last under way for Norfolk, or as near Norfolk as Confederate regulations permitted a Federal vessel to approach.

Most joyfully the travellers bestowed themselves on boxes and logs in the ancient craft. To the overlooking of the several Federal officers who accompany the Flag of Truce, all are eagerly watching for the first glimpse of the loved stars and bars. This was at Sewall's Point. But alas, and alas! distance distinguished them wofully little from the stars and stripes.

On, while level-wooded shores draw nearer, and the boat is fairly in James River—on, until a heavy gun booms from a battery on shore, the signal for the boat to stop. Crany Island with its fort lies round that bend. Thence shortly skims over the waters a barge, and all start forward for their first view of a Confederate soldier. Ah, these are not ragged, not barefooted. And many a heart beats gladly at sight of that ununiformed but stoutly-clad crew.

And oh the cordial greetings to the strangers, who, because they are "our soldiers," are old friends already—the joyous smiles and merry laughter, and assurances that the fast-pouring "Dixie rain will do us no harm!" For, ladies not being expected, this is the only available boat, the steamers being at Norfolk, and the fog too dense for signals. The soldiers endeavor, with overcoats and shawls, to form a shelter for ladies and children, and a happier cargo could never be found.

With light hearts, and appetites to create a famine in the camp, were all tales true of rebeldom starvation. They arrive at Crany Island, and soon forget hunger, wet, and weariness in the kind hospitality of General Smith's headquarters.

Fadette has quite a budget of closely-written papers to deliver into the general's hands. Then, after a hurried tour around the new fort, she once more crosses the familiar gangway of the Selden, and takes with her, on her way to Norfolk, grateful remembrances of her first experience of "the Chivalry" under arms.

When that night she stands at a window of the Atlantic Hotel, before she draws her curtains, that murky sky is the brightest she has seen for months. And she wonders, with a half-smile and a blush, whether *somebody* in Dixie may not be looking up at the heavens from his camp, and thinking now of her.





CHAPTER VIII.

IN CHARLESTON.

"Hear what Highland Nora said:
The Earlie's son I would not wed,
Should all the race of nature die,
And none be left but he and I—
For all the gold, for all the gear,
For all the lands both far and near,
That ever valor lost or won,
I would not wed the Earlie's son."

SCOTT.

STARLIGHT and lamplight were glimmering along the streets of Charleston, when a carriage from the Railway Depot drove through them until it passed the battery, and drew up before a massive iron gateway.

Fadette leaned eagerly forward, as the drowsy old gentleman, her travelling companion, bestirred himself, energetically fumbling about the fastening of the door, while the driver dismounted, and rang the gate-bell with a pull which brought the old negro porter, bowing, to the presence.

Yes, this was Mr. Rutledge's. And Fadette, accepting her friend's arm, followed the servant through a broad courtyard or rather garden, where roses clambering up tall trees gave summer odors to the November air.

Her escort took his leave at the white-columned gallery of the house, the gable end of which was on the street.

She was met in the hall by an elderly negro woman, seemingly the factotum of the establishment, judging by her consequential though respectful demeanor, and quick

orders with regard to Fadette's trunks, to two youthful sons of Ham.

"Mistis's been looking for you this long time, Miss," she said, "and the blue-room's been kep' from all the company a purpose for you. Miss Amy put her wedding off two weeks, account of you coming, till young marster's leave done out. Mistis say for me to bring you right up to your room, Miss."

"My cousin Amy married! This evening!" thought Fadette, becoming conscious of a brilliant blaze of light in the halls, and intense though quiet excitement in the manner of those domestics whom she met in the transit to "the blue-room."

"I'll go tell Mistis you are here, Miss, and send Irene up," the servant said, bustling about, drawing the curtains, and wheeling an armchair before the fire Mistis had had kindled on account of the damp.

Fadette threw off her hat and cloak, and dropping wearily into the chair, took a survey of this her special domain in her new home. It was very appropriately named "the blue-room." A faint suggestion of that color warmed the neutral-tinted walls, the lace curtains were festooned with hangings of blue, and blue velvet were chairs and sofa, harmonizing with oak-wood and light flower-strewn carpet. Flowers in the vases on the mantel, the two or three valuable engravings, and the small carved book-shelves, with their few selected volumes, told of a thoughtful welcome to the stranger.

"*Aquila non mangia mosche*," said Fadette, and rose and went to the book-shelves, to discover by the character of the food, the character of those who had placed it there. She cast, in passing, a congratulatory glance upon the bright face in the mirror, that it was not of those brunettes transfigured by the juxtaposition of blue into jaunettes.

In volume after volume of standard works, modern and more ancient, her name was inscribed in the same straightforward, firm, decidedly sharp, feminine writing. She looked awed. Here were no "mosche," certainly, and she seemed to feel the eagle swoop upon her luckless self, when she should flit aside, as she knew she should, from the straight sunward flight. But at least her aunt, if these were indeed her selection, must have one warm corner in her heart, else she would hardly have chosen "The New-comes," or "Aurora Leigh."

But the latter was a waif. Fadette deciphered in the careless, rather illegible, but manly and free characters on the title-page, the name "Ruthven Erle," and beneath, an explanatory "His mark," in a fair girlish hand.

She was already reading quite a romance in the united writings, wherein Cousin Amy was heroine and bride, and Ruthven Erle was bridegroom—when the door opened.

The volume dropped from Fadette's hold as she went forward to meet the fair and stately woman who entered. The reserved though most kindly manner, the clear scrutiny in the handsome steel-blue eyes bent upon her, embarrassed her, and she could only stammer half-incoherent replies to hospitable questions, and the information that her uncle had gone to meet her at the depot—strange that he had missed her! Evidently that warm corner of the heart was not the vestibule open to any passer-by, but the sanctum sanctorum—the right to enter which might not be lightly won.

"You must be tired, my dear," Mrs. Rutledge soon said, leading Fadette to her seat before the fire, and standing a moment with her hand resting upon her niece's shoulder. "I trust, not too tired to take the part my Amy has assigned you this evening. Your telegram yesterday found her in despair at your non-arrival, you being first bride-

maid, and she and my nephew, who is to serve with you, persistently refusing any substitute. She would have delayed her wedding yet longer, so set was she upon your presence; but our bridegroom's furlough expires to-morrow, and he leaves almost immediately after the ceremony. But, of course, Amy wrote you all."

"How? when?" inquired Fadette, bewildered.

"Did you not receive our letters directed to Richmond, to the care of Mrs. Lennox?"

"Ah, but I did not go on to Richmond. I came direct from Norfolk with a friend of Mrs. Lennox. I had heard nothing of a wedding. I am so sorry! I have so looked forward to being with Amy!"

Her eyes filled with tears of disappointment. Mrs. Rutledge was gratified, and smiled, as she said: "Look forward still then, my child. Amy is not to leave us. Her husband is a private in the field, and of course she cannot be with him. You are not too weary to dress? Amy has everything in readiness for you—rose-color and white lace. Stand up and let me look at you. Why, child, you are indeed almost as tiny as Amy! Irene, your maid, will still have time to make any slight alterations. I shall send her with your tea, notwithstanding your refusal. Afterward, dress as quickly as you can. Amy shall come to you before the guests assemble."

Her maid was just tying the lace sash, and Fadette herself arranging before the mirror a single white camelia in the dark braids waving back from her brow, when there came a manly step without, a tap at the door, and a cordial voice calling her name. Her color deepened, and her lips quivered in a smile, as the next instant her uncle stood before her, put aside her trembling hand, and folded her in his arms.

"So! flowers and laces quite forgot?" he said, after a

moment, holding her off from the broad shelter of his breast, and looking down upon her with kindly hazel eyes, which had a twinkle in them. "But, fair my niece, why did you not note in the catalogue you from time to time sent me of your improvements at school and abroad, the beauty into which has ripened the wild-eyed, sunburnt little romp? Is this she who, one winter at Randolph Honor, hid behind the hedge, and pelted her reverend uncle with snowballs, until he was fain to cry quarter? What! you laugh! and do not repent, wicked one?"

"No, I do not," she declared, stoutly, shaking her head in defiance of the gray hairs that fell in crisp waves upon the genial brow, where, it might seem, yet lingered, here and there, a flake of that snow-shower. "I have not forgotten how you threatened to marry me to a brownie of the moors away down South, while Lionel should be sent to Lethe for consoling. Now there lives in our neighborhood an old, old aunt, Lethe by name, witch and fortune-teller by profession, of whom I stood and stand in deadly awe, past whose cabin on the edge of the wood I would still scamper; and to her keeping I thought you were to consign Lionel. Besides, I knew only princesses in fairy tales could, by right, be disposed of by tyrant uncles. So I was resolved to vanquish you, and vanquish you I did."

"Scorning to be princess, of course you will not be Queen of Hearts. You care nothing for such baubles. You are looking forward to a winter course of reading with your sage uncle, eh?"

"Not one bit of it," she promptly replied to his arch glance.

"And what has become of Master Lionel? Randolph still a prisoner?"

"Still. I wrote to Lionel from Norfolk," she went on,

with color very slightly heightened. "He is in the Virginia army, and—"

The door, slightly ajar, was pushed wider, and a low, musical voice asked—

"May I come in?"

That might have seemed a vision which, upon Fadette's summons, glided into and across the room, had it not now proven itself by a most unvisionary embrace. White gossamer robes;

"Golden tresses wreathed in one,
As the braided streamlets run;"

deep violet eyes; loving, truthful, timid; a childlike brow, and childlike freshness in the blue-veined fairness and soft rose-tints; a mouth for smiles and loving words, quivering now and then at the remembrance of words presently to be spoken.

And now the mother stays a moment in the doorway, commends Fadette's promptitude in dressing, tells both girls they "will do very well," and must come directly down, and while the daughter nestles in the father's outstretched arms, for the last time all his own, takes Fadette under her wing, bearing her off to be introduced to bride-maids and attendant cavaliers.

Mrs. Rutledge led the way to the library; but no one was within. And when Amy soon sent for her mother, Fadette was left alone.

That comfortable posture, half reclining within a bow-window, where festooned lace softened the light from the chandelier, was pleasant after weariness of travel and sleepless nights preceding. Fadette drooped her head upon her hand, and from reverie passed into a light dreamful doze. In it, the past now outstripped, now jostled, now went hand in hand with the future. A thought of Lionel and

of that troth-plighting, mingled with a vision of this wedding, where she was conscious of being Fadette, yet Amy the bride, and Lionel strangely blended with the bridegroom, Ruthven Erle.

Perhaps this closing scene was suggested by a dreamily overheard conversation; for at that moment she was roused by low tones, and between sleeping and waking half opened her eyes. They were too misty with slumber to take more than a vague view of the rose-colored bridemaïd, who, from her seat near the hearth, was looking up so prettily to the gentleman before her. But her words were clear:

"Yes, dear little Amy is undoubtedly perfectly happy. Do you know, I cannot but wonder at it, betrothed as she was, from earliest girlhood, to her cousin. And certainly Mr. Erle is a man to whom one could well submit to be betrothed, even without the exercise of one's own free-will. You smile. No, I do not see that Mr. Weir, bridegroom though he is chosen, and friend as he is of mine, is Mr. Erle's equal in any one respect. Yes, indeed, I do honestly own to quite sharing in the universal furor about that gallant cavalier. What do you say—that Amy did not share in it? She behaved angelically, as indeed she does in all things, but I cannot think her breaking of the engagement was entirely optional—was not rather brought on in a degree through his coolness on his return from Arkansas. Do you not remember a rumor of a flirtation there? Under the rose, my beau idéal is perhaps slightly given to flirting."

Whether "on this hint he spake," Fadette did not give heed. She was engrossed in the overthrow of the romance she had been building up. In her edifice, the theory of first love was the very corner-stone of the foundation, the removal of which must cause the fall of the entire fabric. And great was the fall thereof. So great, that she could

hardly believe sweet Amy now escaped unbruised from the ruins, and standing on the threshold of a second mansion of happiness, which, since that founded upon a rock had tottered, could hardly remain firm among the shifting sands.

While with brow bowed on her palm she pondered, troubled, on the cloud she thought to discern hovering above her cousin, and traced to it the varying shadow she had seen flitting over that fair face, the door opened, and there entered bridemaids and bridemen, gathering now in a merry group around the fire.

Fadette did not move. Her retreat was partly veiled from them, and to present herself alone among strangers was alarming. But ten minutes were not elapsed, when the curtains were parted wider.

It was one of those strangers, to whom she glanced up hurriedly—a tall, strong-built man, perhaps not handsome, yet whose fair waving hair and beard were well set off by the gray and gold uniform, whose noble head and square broad forehead conveyed at once the knowledge of power, and whose deep-blue eyes met Fadette's with a puzzling expression, while he extended his hand, accosting her by name.

"My aunt, Mrs. Rutledge, sent me here," he said, "to seek my truant bridemaid. Will you let me plead an almost cousinship, in apology for thus unceremoniously introducing Ruthven Erle?"

That name, coming as it did while she was yet regretfully regarding the demolition of her romance and pouring out thoughts of pity on her cousin, who must have been, if she were not now, made so unhappy, roused in the hasty impulsive girl a prejudice against its owner. And not very graciously, seeing that he still stood before her abating nothing of his demand, she yielded him the tips of cold

reluctant fingers. And when he lifted the tiny glove she dropped, and held it outstretched upon the palm of his own well-shapen hand, one instant before returning it to her, she forgot to render thanks, declaring in her own mind that she was going to hate him—*that* she knew—she did not care, though he was her aunt's nephew.

The introduction thus had led to scarcely monosyllabic acquaintance, when the bridal tableau at length formed in the drawing-room.

The tearless, tranquil, solemn ceremony was over. The aged white-stoled clergyman had in God's name joined those together whom none might put asunder. The tearless, trembling bride had lost her pallor in a blush, as her friends came forward. And the handsome young soldier-husband's flush of triumph had waxed prouder yet, while he drew within his arm that little clinging hand which was his own.

Fadette's hand rested within Mr. Erle's arm, while she passed through the drawing-rooms, detained now by Mr. Rutledge, until a host's duties summoned him away, and again by Mrs. Rutledge's introductions—but ever reclaimed by her attendant brideman, as by prior right. Fadette more than suspected, after detecting a lurking smile of amusement following upon some involuntary retort of her own, that he had perceived her sudden aversion, and was bent on overcoming it. So, laughing within herself, she tacitly acquiesced in his engrossing attentions, flashed back merry repartee, mocked at his serious words, affected dullness for his *bons-mots*, and altogether was as mischievous, fascinating a fairy, as ever hovered in and out among the roses on a cloudless starlit night.

Pacing to and fro on the gallery among those roses, in reply to a well-turned, though flowery compliment, she rallied him upon the fairy gift so lavishly to *conter fleurettes*,

and reminded him, while she paused to gather a blossom, how long the thorns outlasted it.

He looked down upon her smile as she stood fastening the flower in her dress. Evidently the walls of that fortress of prejudice, so hastily erected and armed against him, were not to fall down at sound of the trumpet of her praises seven times blown upon.

"I accept the challenge," he said to himself—"Let roses wither and thorns be yours, my little one, until you shall e'en set me upon the topmost pinnacle of enmity, quite apart from and above my fellows."

So he rejoined carelessly—

"Therefore the wary among rose-fanciers do not carry their hearts in their hands, lest they be torn quite in pieces by vidette thorns. Look you, that rosebud in your bosom has stabbed and wounded no one. The red ones are bright in the blood of the slain. 'Under which king, Lancaster or York, are you?'" He bent forward for a glimpse of her averted face, where York had quickly unfurled warlike ensign.

"I would I were a great sharp thorn! You are excessively imper—"

She stopped, dismayed.

"——vious to small ones?" he supplied, in perfect good-humor.

She checked herself, biting her lips while the color surged to her brow. She half withdrew her hand from his arm. But a vision of her lone self recrossing the broad hall, to seek her aunt in those thronged drawing-rooms, and, too, a sense of shame-faced childishness in her anger, made her refrain from the display of it. So, after a moment, she suggested following some of the promenaders as they passed within.

"I have no manner of doubt," he said, as he turned,

promptly obedient, "dozens of rose-fanciers have this hour been heaping anathemas upon devoted me, in that I have borne triumphantly off the freshest acquisition to our city conservatories." And ostentatiously lifting his hand, the proportions and the whiteness of which Fadette, in spite of herself, could not but admire, he stroked his moustache with an exquisite air, and an ineffable smile at invisible rivals.

"Not too early, I perceive," he remarked, on entering the drawing-room. "Weir there is speaking to our aunt as if about to take leave. He goes at once to his regiment in Virginia. My poor little Amy! But the honey-moon and its pleasing lunacy will endure the longer."

In the last sentence, he banished the touch of feeling in the mention of his cousin's name, and with it the relenting of his listener. She asked, somewhat anxiously—

"And you?"

"I? oh, you shall see me frequently." Fadette heard with an equivocal lifting of the brows. "Quite live here when off duty. Stationed at Moultrie—not to be dispensed with in the defences of the harbor. Though, for that matter, neither am I here. There should have been a family arrangement at one time between little Amy and—but—a—" he ended with an affectation of embarrassed consciousness.

Fadette's eyes flashed upon him, and she dropped his arm as quickly as possible, on reaching the bay window, where gathered almost a family group. The few guests there conversed somewhat apart, thus leaving space for the last words of the departing bridegroom.

"O my cousin shallow-hearted! O my Amy—mine no more!" ejaculated, in mock agony, Mr. Erle, at the same time interposing his broad shoulders between the "shallow-hearted" and curious or careless observers.

They were dispersing now. Mr. Weir had shaken hands, and so had those comrades who were to return with him to the army.

He paused, the last, upon the gallery, and sighed heavily. But a tiny white figure glided like a moonbeam through the shadows—a small hand was laid timidly in his—one instant, she was clasped to his breast—the next, they were parted.





CHAPTER IX.

SOUR GRAPES.

“ ‘ Little head, leant on the pane,
Little finger drawing down it
The long trailing drops upon it—
And the “ Rain, rain, come to-morrow,”
Said for charm against the rain.’ ”

MRS. BROWNING.

AS these lines were pronounced behind her, Fadette started from her twilight occupation thus described, and confronted the speaker, Ruthven Erle. Confronted—for during her month's residence here in Charleston, she had learned to be up in arms at the very sound of his voice. Yet though that voice alone in all her bright young life had thwarted or contradicted her—though the word-warfare was wont to be repeated at every frequently recurring visit—though in many a skirmish her “black flag” had gone down, and she now shrugged her shoulders and suppressed a “Provoking!” before replying to him—still, in spite of herself, the rain dripped, dripped, in less dismal monotony from the eaves.

“So you actually dare thus jeopardize your Attic salt?” she said, slowly yielding her hand in greeting, as he waited determinedly for her to do.

“Left every particle behind me in garrison,” he replied, leaning beside her against the window-frame, with a deep breath of comfort. “And ventured across the raging billows—how they did rage!—all for the sake of a fair

maiden, who should therefore be a little complaisant. A dull day."

"Not at all. Music and letter-writing in the morning, with any amount of gossiping and soldiers' work, and a book this evening, left nothing to be desired."

"Indeed! Amy says she and some one—my aunt, doubtless—were wishing for one Ruthven Erle to read aloud 'Testimony of—'"

Fadette blushed and laughed.

"Well, and if I did," she interrupted, "that is because Hugh Miller is easiest of comprehension with a peripatetic geological dictionary. But this book, Mr. Erle, brought you even more vividly before me this evening."

He bent down over the volume she extended, reading in the waning light—

"'Vanity Fair!' What, is it gentle William who embodies me? Right glad am I there was never masculine Becky Sharpe."

"No, no. But you are an embodied chapter. Will you deny it? Who then stands aloof in *Vanity Fair*, watching and amiably sneering at feeble vacillating gropers in the dark, or at the few who, able to discern the golden sun, covetously stare themselves blinder than the blindest whom they lead?"

"How can I watch, who am stumbling in *Vanity Fair* with all the crowd?"

"If you are, your eyes are open, and you can therefore laugh at the ridiculous capers cut by your friends, as you are laughing now at my moralizing mood. No, it is vain to put up your hand, hoping to conceal that smile. My eyes, too, happen to be open just at this moment; and see how my charm against the rain has dispelled it!"

She unclosed the long French window, and he followed her out upon the gallery.

Indeed, "such a charm was right Canidian." For now across the dripping lawn a setting sunbeam stole, and snowy clouds, just tipped with flame and gold, drifted across the skyey dome. So clear, so deeply blue, that dome uplifted itself higher than ever above the waving canopies, which, floating in mid-air, seemed rather to belong to earth. The low-branched trees which trailed almost to the ground, and so shut out all save a shifting glimpse of the tall iron railing and the street beyond, still tossed off, gust by gust, their freighted streams. The violets and hyacinths scattered broadcast over the sward beneath the live-oaks, and the fringe of valley-lilies under the glossy Cherokee hedge, sent up their sweetest dewy odors on the moist breeze, which here where Fadette stood, shook out with each shower of rain-drops fresh perfumes from clamoring rose-clusters.

"There," she said, caressing Leo, who had bounded to her side from his couchant posture on the gallery steps—"there is one golden streak in the twilight. A clear morrow at last, I prophesy."

"A more-than-ever-stormy morrow," he prophesied, teasingly. "Be advised by me, and philosophically welcome this weather as inuring to the dreariness of the backwoods. There, amid not only water down-dropping, but water surrounding, paroquets alone will take up from the moss-grown dim old forest the conversational treble, and frogs, from beneath your very gallery steps, the bass. When you are once quietly settled on my place in Arkansas—"

"But," Fadette cried impatiently, "because the Yankees at Port Royal have taken possession of my uncle's plantation, and because he has been obliged to remove his negroes to your horrible Arkansas swamp, it does not necessarily follow that he will remove us there. I am sure, when he sees for himself how unbearably desolate— But you shall

not make me quarrel this day of days. No, not although you do raise your brows with such exasperating doubt. For, Mr. Erle, this day has been set apart, from all its fellows, by the arrival of a letter from my guardian."

She glanced up to him, as if for some response to her gladness. But his eyes fell suddenly from hers, and he walked on by her side in silence.

After a moment he spoke.

"I, too, have had my letter to-day. What, you are curious? Aye, from your other guardian—and 'thereby hangs a tale.' Where its scene is to be laid, in Arkansas or Charleston, I alone can unfold. My letter against yours—a fair exchange. No"—as she lifted her head defiantly—"quite in vain to think of asking Amy or my aunt, as I have yet shown my letter to neither."

"Ah, Mr. Erle, do tell me! Do say we are not to go!"

"Your letter, your letter, or I disclose absolutely nothing. What did your guardian write of?"

Her blushes came fast and hotly.

"Of what should he write, in the regulation-page of note paper, open for inspection?"

Her stammering speech betrayed her. He looked with an intensity of earnestness down upon her downcast face. As he looked, he paled somewhat.

"Come, come, his topic. Mine is fully worth it."

"Well then," she said, lifting her head with an assumption of carelessness. "Behold one of the topics."

She extended, with the words, the hand on which was Lionel's ring, guarded by the diamond. She tapped the glittering gem, and held it out so that the waning light flashed on it.

In truth, her guardian's letter had chiefly borne, in ambiguous phrase, upon the bond of which Lionel's ring was

the sign-manual, and of which Lionel had found means to inform him.

But Ruthven Erle was not deceived by the diamond-glitter. Bending down closely toward it, he had deciphered the tiny L. R. engraven on the signet, in a scroll beneath the cameo design.

He did not start, for it was almost what he had expected. But it was some seconds before he spoke.

"A strange subject for a Flag of Truce prison-letter. Am I to infer that it is of the gem's intrinsic value? Let me examine it, while I recount my tidings."

"It is an heir-loom," she said, carelessly, putting it into his hand. "Magnificent, is it not? There needs many a caution to take care of it. The other? Oh, that my guardian and I selected together in Florence. An ugly thing, but curious."

She yielded it too, the flush of shame for her equivocation only very slightly heightened.

"Lloyd Randolph?" he said, half absently, half inquiringly.

He missed the instantaneous expression of relief which flitted over Fadette's face. How stupid in her!—certainly he would think it her guardian's ring. And certainly she would keep up the delusion.

She presently forgot signet and diamond in his news. Yes, Mr. Rutledge had really written, and Mr. Erle must endeavor to obtain a month's leave, and escort the family out to Arkansas, whither master and servants had preceded.

She was still pacing up and down, half-tearful and half-indignant, deaf to any word of comfort which Ruthven Erle might utter, when a step sounded behind her on the gravelled pathway. Leo had leaped from her side with a sharp bark of joy. She turned—she sprang forward, and both her hands were caught in the clasp of Lionel's.

Yet though that clasp was close, when she looked up joyously his glance did not meet hers. In her excitement, she did not at once wonder at this, but followed his eyes to Ruthven Erle, who now stood alone. The rings flashed instantly upon her mind. What must Lionel think? But she gave no outward sign; only introduced the two gentlemen, saw them shake hands—cordially on Ruthven Erle's part, somewhat coolly on that of Lionel. And she kept up the conversation gayly enough, not forgetting to address Lionel invariably as Tom,—by which allusion to Tom Brown's adventures, however, she failed to provoke a smile. And when subjects of special interest to the two home friends more frequently recurred, and Ruthven Erle at last re-entered the house, she called after him to tell Mrs. Rutledge and Amy that Captain Randolph had arrived.

Then, as if unconscious of delinquency, she linked her arm in a matter-of-course way in Lionel's, and the two paced up and down together.

She observed his clouded face.

"If you have no word for me this evening, Lionel," she said quietly, after a turn or two, "I may as well leave you to your meditations."

She knew too well that they were all of her, and that his arm would draw hers closer. Nor had she the slightest intention of going.

But though he drew it closer, the cloud deepened, and he said, angrily—

"Go then. That damned Erle is waiting for you, doubtless."

"Lionel! do you speak thus to me?"

"Fadette, how can you torture me thus? You abuse your power. You know it is absolute—that I cannot, if I would, free myself—that I dare not lift and cast aside these lightly-lying, velvet-soft fingers resting so carelessly, so

pulselessly, against my heart. You know, were you to tell me now that you had but a little, a very little love for me, I would entreat—Fadette, give me that little! Leave me not utterly destitute!”

He entreated now. And her hand tapped his arm gently, as it might have done that of an importunate child.

“My dear Lionel, don’t be absurd. Have I not given you all my heart can hold? You must be the judge, but you seemed to think it enough to be worth the having. As for this idea about Ruthven Erle, let me tell you we both hate very cordially, notwithstanding that occasionally we find each other amusing. You are in more danger from the scowling man in the moon up there, so far as our proximity is concerned. And don’t be so very self-distrustful. Did you never hear of the lover whom his mistress told deprecatingly, that she was not worthy of him? He answered that she ought to know best, of course.”

An hour or two after, when Fadette was for a few moments alone in the drawing-room, there came approaching footsteps on the gallery without. Lionel had left her for an hour after dinner. Despatched on army business to Charleston, he had only this evening to give her. But it was not to meet him, that she now advanced. She knew the step well, and when she found Mr. Erle alone lounging without, in the leisurely enjoyment of his cigar, it was as she expected. She must have her ring back before Lionel should come again.

Ruthven Erle rose as she advanced, and offered his chair.

“Confess,” he said, while she hesitated, yet finally took possession, and he seated himself on the low balustrade—“you advanced to meet black eyes and moustaches.”

“Blue eyes are sometimes astonishingly clear-sighted, Mr. Erle.”

"Thank you. And now another question. Do five feet eight and incipient moustaches invariably comprise 'an abridgment of all that is pleasant in man?'"

"Not unfrequently. You who are so apt at quotations," she continued, with an arch side-glance, "doubtless remember, 'often the cockloft is empty in those whom nature hath builded many stories high.'"

"Have mercy, my Lady Disdain, else you reduce me to bring up my entire reserve corps of words, and

" 'Put my whole wit in a jest,
Resolved to live a fool the rest
Of my dull life.' "

"What! you Sir Sapient, do you not know that 'words are wise men's counters—they do but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools?'"

"They can then buy me no substitute for the shafts of my fair—yet how unfair enemy!"

"Pocket them, most valiant knight, like him of old, who

" 'Although he had much wit,
Was very shy of using it.' "

"A truce, a truce. And in token thereof—" he began.

"And in token thereof," she interposed—"my ring, Sir, if you please."

"The precious heir-loom?"

He placed it in her hand, but she still kept it extended.

He appeared not to notice it, until she said, with unassumed timidity, and a blush which, though involuntary, was exceedingly *à propos*:

"My—my—guardian's ring, Mr. Erle."

She colored deeper and deeper beneath his steady gaze. After a moment, he held out his hand also.

"In token of a truce, I will restore it," he replied. Then,

as he placed it upon her finger, added, "Yet a truce is mere child's play. Let us now and hereby swear a peace. Truly, I have not been a 'man of war from my youth up,' and you would not crush a conquered foe who thus surrenders at discretion?"

"Vastly pretty—'that was laid on with a trowel:'" the girl laughed.

He dropped her hand, rejoining, half-amused, half-vexed:

"Hang quotations—why cannot you be original? Hang me, too, if I ever use another."

"Really, Mr. Erle," Fadette exclaimed after a pause, during which he had resumed his seat and his cigar, and she had been pulling idly at the yet dripping, trailing roses, now and then sending a shower down upon her, "I am more and more convinced that you are one of nature's grand mistakes, obviously intended for a smoky chimney. And to fulfil your destiny, there needs but a scolding wife. What a pretty proverb the couple would enact!"

He flung the end of his cigar over his shoulder, lazily folding his arms, and leaning upon the gallery-column, as he replied:

"Exactly my own opinion. But there is one difficulty in the way. Of scolding *wives* there is no dearth. But the young ladies, pretty dears, have not even the word scold in their vocabularies. That is a lesson not to be learned before they outgrow bread-and-butter, and the milk-and-water of human kindness."

"Oh, the first thunder-cloud turns that sour. By the way, where got you your acidity? Are you very sure there are no sour grapes in the question?"

"I am very sure there are."

"Ah, do tell me all about them," and she bent eagerly forward in her chair—"I'm the best confidant in the world—won't tell a soul beyond—"

"Listen."

He lowered his voice and fixed his eyes upon her as he went on:

"The grapes in question positively won't be plucked. They grow aloft, quite out of reach, and have hedged themselves about with the fiercest thorns imaginable. They are not going to ripen and fall down at anybody's feet, even should market-day come and go. They will have the winner climb for them; and as for throwing him down a tendril to aid in the ascent—not they! And some one—for aught I know, some one I must not strive to outstrip—may be climbing higher up on the other side of the tree."

"Handsome grapes?"

"Very."

"White or dark?"

"Decidedly on the brunette order."

"Large or small?"

"Quite a slender bunch."

"Young?"

"Certainly not green. By the by," he added, changing air and attitude, and banishing with a mocking smile the melancholy brooding in the keen eyes and around the sarcastic mouth—"by the by, is it altogether out of rule respectfully to inquire your age? I'll give you the year of her birth, if you will give me the year of yours."

"But were you in earnest just now?" she asked, waiving his question and coloring slightly, half ashamed of her seventeen years.

"Perfectly so."

"And when did you see the dark ladye?"

"Let me see—about the spring or early summer."

"I cannot imagine whom you mean. You won't tell me? Then let me ask—forgive if I am impertinent, but

you do look so very resigned—why you did not then attempt the seizure of the spoils?”

“Merely because I am not a fool.”

“That word *was*, once upon a time, synonymous with jester. I wish you would look as you did a moment ago.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Oh, because you so reminded me of—I don’t know whom—but something in the eyes when they were troubled. You are quite changed now.”

“Do you forget faces?” he asked, shading his from the light which now streamed from the drawing-room window.

“I forget every thing.”

“Every thing?”

“Every thing in the world save ancient prejudices, Mr. Erle,” she replied, gayly.

“The most narrow-minded—”

He spoke almost angrily, and she interrupted him in no milder tone.

“Until I choose my Mentor, Sir—”

“Still at your wonted warfare, Miss Belligerent?” a voice asked at her side. She turned as Amy tapped her shoulder. The momentary vexation passed, and she responded with a smile:

“Aye. The chivalry hath laid siege to Sumter, but the bulletin is still ‘nobody hurt.’”

“Excepting the besieger,” interposed Mr. Erle, ruefully. “But what can the chivalry do when the belligerent is also belle-regent?”

“A reward for the worst pun on record,” laughed Amy. “Come, mocking-bird, a song!”

Ruthven Erle stood beside Fadette at the piano, turning the leaves of her music, while his glance wandered from

her bright face to the rather dissatisfied one of Captain Randolph, who across the room kept up a desultory conversation with Amy. Fadette selected a song, and opening it, nodded to Lionel, saying—

“Your old favorite now, Tom.”

Ruthven Erle bent down and asked, abruptly:

“Is he the brother of—”

“My guardian? Yes,” she made answer, looking up wonderingly at his sudden pause and obvious confusion.





CHAPTER X.

IN ARKANSAS.

“Griev’st thou that hearts should change?

Lo, where life reigneth,

Or the free sight doth range,

What long remaineth?

Spring with her flowers doth die—

Fast fades the gilded sky—

And the full moon on high

Ceaselessly waneth.”

ANON.

AND this is Arkansas!” cries Fadette.

On this sultry Christmas eve, in her light muslin dress, she is standing at the unclosed window of a pretty cottage parlor. It opens upon a gallery where velvet-leaved woodbine clammers up the columns against which the wild peach flings ever-green glossy boughs. The cotton-wood hard by is rustling its large gray withered leaves, the few that winter has left, with a stormy sound; and those locusts there without the arbored gate, and the catalpa which grows within it, sway to and fro, slender, pale, and naked. But the magnolias, the spreading willow-oaks there to the left, and the wild peach scattered in vivid verdure here, there, and everywhere over the lawn, have scarce felt the frosty touch. The straight walk leads to the gate between hedges of daily roses now in full bloom for Christmas honors. A breath of violets is wafted on the heavy air, from under the crab-apple tree far to Fadette’s left, whence stretches the level lawn to

low-rolling pastures, rounded by the gleam of waters. On the other hand, where ends the lawn, neat rows of quarter-cottages rise in the grove. Here, where the trees cluster densely on the edge of the lawn, and the light fence curves outward to the road, nestles a pagoda-like lodge for guests' additional accommodation. Beyond the low gate and the line of locusts to the road, the grassy banks slope steeply to the water. There, great oaks uplift denuded branches in delicate tracery against the sky, where long-lingering sunset flushes change, and quiver, and deepen, merging at last into clouds that drift on stormily. Beneath the bank gleams the chute, sheltered by the low brown field-shores of an island. Past the island's near wooded point, the water swells into a broad expanse of lake, its distant outer rim level-bound, in the semicircular sweep of twelve or fifteen miles, by that low purple-gray line of woodland, the white-streaked road, and sere fields with alternating light and shade of rude worm-fences. The chute as yet lies tranquil, only now and then stirring, awakened by a lower gust of wind. But the lake already rises in green waves, foam-crested against the coming storm.

"This is Arkansas." Ruthven Erle tossed aside the paper he had scarcely been reading in the twilight, and came to her side.

"See the innocent white-dove cloud swallowed up by that great black cormorant," he said. "We shall have a grand Christmas celebration of thunder-storm ere long. Our poor little Janet will be quite unhappy about her friend, Kriss Kringle. She assured 'Cousin Ru' this morning that she did not believe a word about his riding through the air on his deer, because her fawn could not fly at all. Therefore, she was determined to watch the boats all day, to see him cross the lake."

"A thunder-storm! Oh, Mr. Erle!"

"Afraid of them? and shivering. Come away from the window—that fire is only bright, not warm. So—I resign the armchair in your favor, and will listen quite humbly at your feet while you shall explain the dangers of those dread thunderbolts, the mere mention of which has dashed the color from your face. That is, if you have not taken the vow of silence, as might appear from your mysterious conduct of the last hour."

"No, I won't dispossess you of your throne," she replied, wheeling away the easy-chair and drawing a low seat before the cheerful hearth. "As for sitting at any one's feet, I cannot imagine you in that predicament."

"Six feet two before your two tiny ones. Would you consider them worth the raising up?" he asked, throwing himself into the rejected chair, and puffing away at the cigar which he had lighted with her gracious permission.

"Stoop to conquer, Sir, I never would."

"But if you fly at the sun, mocking-bird," he said lightly, "the chances are your eyes are dazzled, and you beat your poor little wings against some narrow garret window, glittering in the reflection."

"I am content to wait the sun's good pleasure in seeking my lowly nest. If he come, good. If he come not, why, good too. I'll not pine."

"Not you. You'll flit at the call of some glitterless plucked biped—you'll flutter about and build your nest and twitter away, forgetting song and aspirations."

She bent her head in mocking acquiescence, and sat on in silence. The flickering firelight threw her delicate profile into relief against the white marble. Waving hair rolled back from the temples, where blue veins traced themselves beneath the transparent brunette hue. Eyes veiled by long curved lashes were fixed dreamily upon the fire, and around the small mouth hovered an unconscious smile.

He was leaning back, and his right hand, holding the neglected cigar, hung lightly over the arm of his chair. Despite its slenderness, its whiteness, and rose-tinted palm, there was that about the hand instinct with the power of the man. Idle and careless now, upon occasion it could grip, and that firmly. A fitting servant of the cool keen eyes reading Fadette's face so searchingly.

"And *à propos* of thunderbolts," he reminded, as a low distant roll broke upon the stillness, and Fadette started.

"Mr. Erle, you are laughing at me," she said, her eyes filling and her lip trembling.

"Laughing? Not I. A tear?" and he leaned forward, gently intercepting the hand which would have brushed stealthily away the unbidden tell-tale. "Nay, why will you distrust me?"

She glanced up at him timidly. Then with a sudden impulse she laid her other hand upon that which he still held in his firm grasp.

Her gaze was downcast, and she did not see, as she withdrew her hands and folded them contentedly upon her knee, how his brow flushed, and he drew a hard breath to keep back some words that were clamoring for utterance.

"I know you will not laugh at me now," she said simply; "I know you will be sorry for me when I tell you what scenes every thunder-storm brings before my mind."

And she began the story of that night at Randolph Honor—of the arrest, the captivity, the escape which she had planned for another. Her voice grew cold there, and she spoke sneeringly of the selfish blindness of the stranger—bitterly of his escape—scoffingly of his offer to return and deliver himself up to the enemy.

At first he had given her words of sympathy from time to time. Now, when she ended, he said slowly:

"It were better for him had he never been born."

She lifted her head.

"There it is again, that puzzling likeness," she cried eagerly. "Mr. Erle, who can it be you so much resemble? That expression haunts me. And what troubles you? A song for your thoughts, if you care for one."

"I do, indeed," he replied in his wonted manner; "but I cannot let my valuable thoughts go for a mere song."

"Oh, very well, I've named my price;" and she resumed her old posture, first flashing an arch glance upon him.

"Are you not going to sing for me?" he inquired, after a moment spent in relighting his cigar.

She made no answer; and when she spoke again it was on an irrelevant subject.

"I do think, Mr. Erle, that Miss Vaughan, who called upon us this morning, is the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

"Decidedly so."

"Such magnificent dark eyes. Every feature so faultless. Not faultily faultless either, for her face has depths, or perhaps I should say heights, of expression I never saw in any face before. And an exquisite figure—I'd give the world to be as tall. An Italian princess."

"Indian, rather. She claims the blood of Pocahontas."

"Really?"

"Really. Did you not hear me address her by that heroine's name, Matoaca?"

"You have known her long, then?"

"We are friends of years' standing,—ever since I bought this place, seven years ago."

"Has she been grown up all that time?" she asked.

"All that time; which has developed her from a girl of eighteen into a perfect woman."

"And how long since you last saw her?" she inquired next, inly blushing again for her seventeen years.

"Since the early summer," he replied.

She cast a hurried glance upon him as he reached forth his hand, filliping the ashes from his cigar. And when he turned to her again, she pushed back her chair with an impatient movement, and went away to the piano, murmuring something about that fire being enough to burn one up.

And indeed she was flushed to the temples.

"Mr. Erle," she began, after a short silence, filled up by rapid marches and energetic waltzes, "do all those people live together?"

"All what people, Miss Sphynx?"

"Oh, that odious little Grahame concern: you know whom I mean," she returned impatiently.

"Miss Grahame, courteous one? She, her cousin Mr. Grahame, his niece Miss Vaughan—no relative of hers, however—and his daughter-in-law, whom you have not yet seen, and whose husband is in Virginia, all reside in the famous 'Sleepy Hollow,' as Miss Matoaca has it. Proceed in your cross-examination: I will e'en unfold all the gossip of the country as it was of old."

He came and leaned with folded arms on the piano.

She kept up a restless accompaniment to her words as she asked:

"Is 'Sleepy Hollow'—it must be a very stupid place—far off?"

"Twenty miles—quite a visitable Arkansas distance. A constant visitor there, I never found 'Sleepy Hollow' wearisome with Matoaca Vaughan. To her ennobling influence," he went on warmly, "I owe more than words can measure. Evil shrinks abashed from her presence. For her mind, it is of the highest order—deep, yet brilliant."

"So icily cold, those brilliant people!" she interrupted with a shiver.

"Upon the surface only," he returned, surprised at the unaccountable dislike she had conceived for his friend.

She bent over a music-book, seeking a song which he requested.

This Matoaca Vaughan, then, was she whom he must climb to win. To his words now those of an evening in Charleston came with "confirmation strong as proof from Holy Writ." This was the lofty fruit which would fall at nobody's feet, seen last summer—brunette—certainly not green.

Hitherto she had in her own mind called his avowal "the fable of the grapes," and now she felt aggrieved, as though he had deceived her. But what were his grapes to her, at all events—"Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?"

So she pressed open the leaves of the book upon the piano.

"Our singing-bird is weary," he said gently, as she faltered on a note, and pushed back her stool.

"Then let her fly, Ruthven," answered Amy, who at that moment had thrown open the library door unobserved. "Have you forgot, sweet coz, the event of the Christmas holidays—the double wedding and grand ball for which you were making such elaborate preparations yesterday? Would you believe it, Ruthven, she has decked out Penelope and Janet (the dusky) in white muslin and blue flowers, to say nothing of Irene's resplendency. Irene is one of the brides, you know. Is not that flying in the face of the catechism with all the pomps and vanities? But come, the wedding-party is assembling, and Mr. Smith has arrived. After the marriage we will go down for a moment to the quarter, and look on at the dance. We have had a delegation with invitations, and my little sister is perfectly wild. You know we were not on our plantation last Christmas, and her memory goes no further back."

The library was quite brilliant as the trio entered. Large lamps threw a softening radiance upon the octagonal walls,

with their grotesquely-carven walnut book-shelves, and upon the crimson hangings of the bow-window opening to the lawn. Ruthvens and Erles love-locked; cavaliers in time-dimmed armor; fayre shepherdess in blue satin and silver-broidered tunic; a judge in gown and full-bottomed wig; venerable clergyman in band and cassock; Revolutionary officer with brilliant uniform and shining sword; these looked down upon this other assemblage. Mr. Smith, the Baptist minister (the plantation negroes were generally Baptists) stood in the centre of the apartment, and before him the affianced four, with their quartette of bridemaids in a line on the left hand, and groomsmen on the right, all arrayed in white. The low bodies and short sleeves of the girls, and the brides' white veils and small head-dress, like white-wreathed caps, set off strangely enough the "ebon image." In the doorways and lower end of the room thronged bright dresses of every style and description, from silks and muslins to gay-patterned calicoes. The men frequently sported cast-off dress-coats of their master's, heightened by dazzling vests. Dark faces, large and small, seemed somewhat sombre in their gravity, as all expressionless staring faces must when unlighted by color. But now they were all gleaming teeth and smiles, as, the short ceremony over, the newly-married pairs bridled up to the window where stood the "white folks," and dropped their courtesies, and shook hands with Marster and Mistis, Mars' Ruthven and our young ladies—retiring in great glee after Marster's little jest.

"Who all dem strange folks, Miss Amy?" one of the brides, a strapping field-hand, stayed to whisper in passing her young mistress.

"Where, Violet? Don't you know Mars' Ruthven, your mistress' nephew, and Miss ——?"

"Oh, ya'p'm, I knows all our own folks; but dem fine

ladies an' gemmen what's a sittin' up yonder, starin' tro' dem gilt windows round de walls? I curcheyed to 'em all my best, Miss Amy, but dey done tuk no sort o' notice, but just keep a lookin' at me all de same. Shamed to speak to us niggers, I reckon; dey don't set no store on us, dressed up so fine deyselves."

Down in the quarter, not a hundred yards' walk beneath the oaks on the lake bank, there might seem a tiny village. Doors set wide open, according to universal negro usage, threw a blaze of ruddy light across the grassy square, closed in by double cabins with neat galleries. In that further cabin, neatly swept and garnished, was spread a long table, where stood, waiting the good 'pleasure of the dancers, the viands Mrs. Rutledge had given out from her store-room with no sparing hand—hams, cold turkeys, pies, and cakes and candies, with abundance of coffee. And in the cabin whence came forth the ruddiest blaze, whence issued a medley of fiddle, triangle, bones, and banjo, with the measured stamp of the fiddler, and the clapping of bystanders keeping time, there were the wedding-guests gathered together. Grandfathers and grannies with "frosty pows" or gorgeous plaid turbans, staring little ones, and young and old who had "got religion," and therefore forsworn music and dancing, pressed against the wall in tiers, or lounged in windows or doorways. But the unconverted seriously and steadily set themselves to dancing each other down, with earnest eyes watching the swift light leaps and springs and turns of their own clumsily-made feet keeping perfect time to the fiddle, the clapping, and the dancer's occasional snatches of song. Wonderful the circumference to which that dandy bridegroom with the white gloves, and the rose in his button-hole, has by weeks of string-plaiting trained his brush-heap of a head, until

the shining black face, the whites of his eyes, and the glittering white teeth are quite eclipsed by its splendor. And the puffs and frizzles upholding the red-rose crown of his opponent, with the wide-spread handkerchief pinned dangling to her side, are no less admirable works of art, precursors of this age of waterfall and crimpings *à la contrabande*. Who boasts the greatest amount of finery is the belle. But on this occasion Fadette's and Amy's munificence, and the equalizing distribution from the annual Christmas-box, of ball-dresses, wreaths, beads, white kerchiefs, and glowing vests and cravats, left little room for envy. "Christmas-gift, Marster"—"Christmas-gift, Mistis"—"Mars' Ruthven"—and the young ladies separately—had been whispered by young and old through half-opened chamber-doors all the early morning, and gifts thus forfeited had been faithfully paid, every trifle being received with childlike rejoicing.

Now the dance gave place to games, still with musical accompaniment. The best dancers were deep in the windings of "Peep, squirrel, peep," and the wild chorus of "Up jamboree, hui," lingered in Fadette's ear as an echo of ancient salvagery, when she went out again on Mr. Erle's arm.





CHAPTER XI.

"SLEEPY HOLLOW."

"All smiles come in such a wise,
Where tears shall fall, or have of old,—
Like northern lights that fill the heart
Of heaven, in sign of cold."

MRS. BROWNING.



MORNING in January. But so genial its awakening smile, that Spring, wont to linger yet another month, is beguiled into the belief that Winter has abandoned the throne to her; and so she steals across the border to occupy it, while, as her soft breath sighs joyfully over tree, and bush, and flower, they

"Audibly do bud—and bud."

The red oaks yet fling bare boughs in wondrous gray tracery against the misty blue or snow-drift heights of heaven. Yet the breeze wafts fragrance from violets scattered over the lawn, and mingles the fainter odors of the rose-hedge, in the pink depths of which a twittering bird is building where a morrow's frost may yet tear down his leafy shelter. Red birds and blue flit from tree to tree, while from yonder gnarled trunk a woodpecker, in garb of white and black, and crimson crest, keeps sonorous rhythm with his hollow far-sounding tãp-tap.

The lake is one silver ripple, save where a white-cap flashes up one instant, and a dark cloud of water-fowl drifts past the island's point, here and there plashing with wings

white-lined as spray—tranquilly learned on the war, so far as concerns scarcity of ammunition.

In the rolling pasture beside the lawn red cattle are standing knee-deep in the clear waters of the slough, blue in the reflection of warm skies. There the wide-spreading willow-oaks from time to time drop from their greenly yet slenderly foliaged boughs a tiny leaf, with a rustle which is heard through the stillness. A few sheep are browsing through the sere deep Bermuda grass, where a dandelion, a white field-daisy, golden tufts of wild chamomile, crop up in fairy rings of verdure. Through the bared oaks and yellow-bunched berries of leafless China-trees, blue threads are curling upward from the quarter-cabins, and melting away into that misty lustre which, like Indian summer, wraps the forest in purple haze. Across the lake, and across a level clearing on its further shores, that haze causes the wooded banks and ridgy water-willows beyond the Mississippi to loom up indistinct and shadowy, like distant hill-ranges. Through the silence surges an almost leafless cottonwood upon the lawn, with a murmur as of distant seas.

Before the gate waited an open carriage. Fadette and Amy were already seated in it, and Mr. Rutledge stood near, giving orders to a servant, and now casting an impatient glance toward the gate. Thence presently sauntered Ruthven Erle, leisurely drawing on his riding-gloves.

"Well, of all provoking men"—the girls began in a breath.

"Where is the woman?" Behold her," he rejoined, turning and nodding as Mrs. Rutledge appeared on the gallery, calling after him, as a last word, "Now, Ruthven, do remember what I have said, and drive carefully."

"Consider me lectured and repentant, young ladies," he went on, advancing to the carriage. "But what is this?"

"Twill never do. I cannot possibly drive these fiery steeds all by my lone self."

"Uncle Rutledge, Mr. Erle, offers you the appointment of whip," called out Fadette.

Mr. Erle sprang up to his place; then, as Mr. Rutledge drew near, held out his hand to Fadette.

"Amy can do as she likes. I am far too comfortable to move," Fadette said, after pretending not to observe the invitation, until it was emphasized by a rather imperative "Come."

"Amy won't do. Come," and he still held out his hand.

She took the seat beside him, saying, with some vexation :

"I do assure you, if it were not for detaining Uncle Rutledge, I should not."

"Sex to the life," he returned gayly. "Probably you have learned from that Latin book—what was it?—grammar?—reader?—you so dexterously hid from me the other day—the origin of this animal's name." For, while speaking, he was occupied in controlling with a strong hand one of the carriage mules obstinately bent upon trotting off in the wrong direction. "There," he continued, as the animal at length yielded, and sped with a will down the road, "you see also why, the quadruped being so much the more tractable, he is lessened from the comparative to the positive degree."

"Well for the *mulier* that she has the advantage," Fadette laughed.

"Not at all. A mere question of time. A firm hand, a keen eye, and—"

"The blind god out of the question," she interposed quickly.

"Blindness out of the question, assuredly. Would you be loved for what you are not, or for what you are?"

She looked down, and the color wavered in her cheek, as she replied :

"I—I would be loved. For what I am, if that be possible. But no one ever loved me, Mr. Erle, who clearly saw my faults."

"You keep them so under control," he said, ironically.

"You know I did not mean that. But to my guardian, they are pretty child-ways. Aunt Randolph looks up to me as to a miracle of wisdom and strength ; Li—Tom—thinks me an angel."

"And your later friends?"

"My uncle," she answered, sinking her voice yet lower, "sees not me but his pet sister, my mother, whom they say I strongly resemble in appearance. Amy gives me all the characteristics her own gentle heart supplies. Aunt Rutledge sees my faults, and I don't think loves me very much, although she is very kind."

"You have omitted one."

"You—understand me thoroughly, Mr. Erle."

She spoke in a stifled tone, and averted her head, absorbed in the evolutions of the worm-fence which formed a running accompaniment to the swift motion of the carriage.

A strange smile hovered around his mouth, as he bent forward, arranging the reins.

"So you think—" he began.

But to no listener. Fadette had turned quite away, and was chatting gayly with Mr. Rutledge and Amy upon the subject of Sleepy Hollow, whither they were bound.

They skirt the lake, with its level cultivated island, fringed at the point by a grove of oaks, beneath which, cattle range among the green and brown and yellow-tinted bushes dipping in the water. Bordering the road lie fields where the shrivelled cotton-plant yet flings out here and there a remnant of its snowy bolls, and where negroes are

busy with stick and hoe, beating down the stalks and gathering them in heaps for the burning. At noontide they lounge beneath the trees at dinner, which those sturdy urchins, gaping round, have brought from the family kitchen of the quarter. Here are four or five mothers returning from a visit to their children, left daily in the quarter in charge of the nurse. And as the carriage passes, the servants form two dusky lines of greeting and staring, with pulling of hats and head-handkerchiefs, and bobbing of courtesies to all white passers-by, exclusive of "poor white trash," whom they hold in sovereign contempt.

Behind, across a half-cleared field of decaying stumps, blackened trunks, and gaunt, white-girdled, well-nigh branchless trees, where a dozen woodpeckers are tapping, sweeps the even line of woodland, blue-gray and purple-brown, with here a shining glimpse of green, and there a blaze of yellow or of red—white line of deadened timber, or black-burnt pillar. The sunlight falls but dimly through the interlacing boughs, although only at intervals there is verdant foliage. Massive vines coil their serpent-length aloft. Heavy Spanish moss, trailing down, a yard in length, or festooned from tree to tree, its silver-gray darkening in denseness, heightens the weird aspect of gigantic cypresses. These rise from the black earth like so many sapling stems, close-welded together, and sloping inward to a pale shaft, which rears itself straight up with branches leafed by tufts of fringy brown.

"Oh, now I begin to believe in Arkansas," exclaimed Fadette, turning again to Mr. Erle. "This is charming. Only look at that tree!" and she quoted softly, as if to herself—

"— The forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,

Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.'

"But I see no pines. Do they not grow here?"

"Unknown to the Mississippi swamp, so called. Cypressess here take the place of pines, scattered among cottonwood, hackberry, pecan, oak, gum, and a few other forest varieties. Those are cypressess," he added, pointing with his whip.

"Dismal enough, in all conscience. But what are those nondescript things standing up so thickly among them? Neither stumps nor posts, although they resemble the latter. There is one almost as tall as the mules."

"Those are cypress-knees, jutting up from the roots; and there is a cypress-well, that low stump sloping outward on the ground. See the black water gleaming far within. They are almost fathomless, and sometimes large enough to engulf unwary horse and rider. Look at those vines."

"How beautiful! They make the trunks of the leafless trees one living mass of green; and the mistletoe, almost like foliage on that oak. If it were not for those, and the frequent showers of scarlet berries, the woods would be sombre indeed, so curtained in by their funereal moss. But, Mr. Erle, what is the meaning of that dark line running all along the trunks of the trees, five or six feet from the ground?"

"High-water mark. When I travelled this road last spring, I floated in a dug-out right over the top of this carriage. 'What is a dug-out?' Why, if you had but a vein of Miss Vaughan's Indian blood, you would know intuitively. A hollow log, paddled like a canoe, with a proclivity for oversetting on the least provocation. But here is your prototype, reasserting himself. Are you not whip?"

Fadette laughed, and, submissive to the not altogether moral suasion of their two drivers, the mules mended their

pace, proceeding so rapidly, unmindful of stumps, mud-holes, and corduroy patches, that Amy more than once cried out, reminding the cousins both that it was still needful to "have Charon crossing the Styx."

Upon a mound, in a clearing where the sun basked warmly down, was served the picnic dinner,—Amy and Fadette being in blissful ignorance, until the provision-basket waxed low, that their convenient *salle-à-manger* was an old Indian burial-ground.

Now out of the woods, and along the river-bank. There the broad levee, its grassy covering faded to a yellow brown, rises like a wall, yielding narrowed glimpses of the Father of Waters, and his steep wooded or sand-barred banks. Anon into the woods again. And as twilight closed in, the carriage emerged beside the willow-fringed lake and home-enclosures of "Sleepy Hollow."

The tall slender green cane which skirts the road through the woods, stops yonder at the boundary of the broad cotton-field. There blaze fires in rows, lighting up dusky figures in white cottonade, who feed them with the cotton-stalks, and ward off the flames from the high worm fence upon the road. Here and there a deadened tree, a column of fire, glows, and sparkles, and falls, tossing off branch by branch, or leaving constellations of red stars upon the midnight blackness of its charred and ruined trunk. And now the field-hands wend leisurely home to the quarter, dimly seen upon the lake, in that clump of oaks in the bend beyond the house. Contented and careless, they pass on, whistling or chorusing as they go, chatting gayly on foot or in that wagon which lumbers by, returning from the corn-crib.

Sleepy Hollow indeed it is, despite the sounds of life and wakefulness. Behind the home-grounds stretch vast rich fields, but beyond, at every point, close in the forest soli-

tudes. Willows and oaks dip on this side into the little oval lake. And out into the middle of the water, on the opposite shallow shore, straggle and push, waist-deep, whole closely-standing lines of cypress and willow, veiling the woods beyond with dense draperies of moss. Midway upon the cleared shore of the lake nestles the homestead. Oaks, pecans, and china-trees shut in the broad circular sweep of lawn, its shrubberies and flowers scattered as if by Nature's hand; and in the stillness, hither comes the distant hooting of an owl, or the heavy flight of a white or blue winged crane, disturbed from its perch in the trees along the lake.

White walls now gleam between forest-trees overshadowing. And, the carriage-sweep made, Fadette has time, while Mr. Rutledge and Amy alight, to take a general survey of the house. It is of frame, high red-brick chimneys running up on the outside, of one story, with broad front and galleries extending round. Front door there is none, the "hall" being a wide-roofed open space, connecting two otherwise separate buildings. Sofa, table, and rocking-chairs here testify to its being a place of social assembling, although this evening the wind blows too freshly, and lights through the crimson-curtained parlor-windows cheerfully second the cordial reception extended to the guests at the carriage by Mr. Grahame, and on the gallery by his niece.

Those crimson curtains swept down, over windows opening to the gallery, upon a handsome carpet gay with bouquets of roses. The walls were merely white-painted wooden panels, yet a fine portrait in oils or a valuable engraving relieved their bareness, and from the high wooden roof, where a beam crossed, depended a massive bronze chandelier.

The huge fireplace, in which a light-wood fire blazed and

crackled merrily away, filled nearly one end of the apartment, and it was before it that Fadette, rising from the grand piano, seated herself just within the group round the centre-table.

For a moment she observed them uninterruptedly. Or rather, she observed Matoaca Vaughan, for further than that glorious beauty she could not at once range. Miss Vaughan was deep in conversation with Mr. Rutledge, who listened with that spontaneous, chivalrous deference which marked his birth and breeding. And well indeed might Miss Vaughan command deference. Fadette thought, as she looked at her, stately and regally radiant, "The shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair,"—and wondered if it were possible for one to behold, nor do her homage. Not for Ruthven Erle, evidently. That was a most admiring glance Fadette intercepted, as he moved restlessly in the midst of a somewhat one-sided colloquy, in which Miss Grahame still detained him.

Fair Amy cooed away like a white dove to Mr. Grahame. His questions had opened the flood-gates of Carolina memories, and they flowed softly through her speech, she the while almost oblivious of time and place and auditor. Fadette caught her far-away gaze, as the tiny hands dropped clasped upon her knee. And she divined that the pink flush flitting over the up-turned face, rose because at the mention of some well-known haunt came back a moment when she had stood there with the lover-husband of an hour.

Amy's interlocutor saw less, with those sharp gray eyes. He was more interested in the number of redoubts on Morris Island than in any one engineer who had helped to build them. He hurried from the one regiment volunteering thence to Virginia, to the more important question of the number remaining for the defence of the city.

Fadette, as she watched and compared Amy to the white dove, thought that were Circe's court held on the shores of Willow Lake, Amy's companion need undergo but slight change, perched before her as he was, "the lean and slippered pantaloons" dwindling not overmuch, and the hooked nose scarce changing into a beak, while the wiry little bowed figure in gray might require no vast stretch of magic to become a quick, ruffled, intelligent gray parrot. A preternaturally intelligent parrot, without doubt. But still a parrot in his short, sharp enunciations of ancient teachings—sapient certainly, but never varying from the wonted groove. And still a parrot in his pretty-poll proud survey of himself when they are spoken—in his ruffled impatience and reiterations, if for a moment unattended.

Fadette glanced across where sat Miss Grahame, *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Erle. The mark of species was strong there, truly. Circe could have made nothing but a parrot of her. A dwindled type—dwindled nose—diluted eyes—diluted chatter, which adverted to little beyond the pretty-poll. And was poll pretty? Perhaps. But the plumage was so beruffled with her strut mental, moral, and corporeal, that beyond "fuss and feather," vision could hardly go.

And Ruthven Erle? Were the disguise of humanity cast aside, how would his true nature stand revealed? The calm, clear eagle-eye—yet no power of imagination could convert into talons that firm shapely hand, which thrusts back now the wave of fair hair that will always droop upon his brow when his head is bent in thought. And of what is he thinking? Not of Miss Grahame's words, surely. But Circe drops her wand. Fadette cannot imagine him in any enchantress's power, charm she never so wisely.

Gradually the conversation became general, wandering from the slender war-news of the day to matters of planta-

tion interest—cotton and its sovereignty—the accustomed dependence of the Mississippi Valley for supplies upon the Northwest—the filial love, as Mr. Rutledge defined it, of the sons of Ham for salt pork—levees—

“By the way, speaking of levees,” said Ruthven Erle, abruptly breaking off his *tête-à-tête*, “how wags the world with old-man Goodfellow? Levees recall my last conversation with him, when he was down with a vengeance upon ‘levee counteractors’—a good though unwitting rendering of contractors.”

“I am glad you reminded me,” said Miss Vaughan; then addressing herself to Mr. Rutledge, added—“Mr. Goodfellow, old-man Goodfellow, as he calls himself, is our county character, Sir. We have an invitation for to-morrow evening at his plantation on the bayou, and if you are curious respecting backwoods festivities, I can promise a hearty welcome. Though very plain, he is greatly respected, and we have always kept up a friendly sort of neighborhood intercourse.”

“Oh, do let us go,” cried Fadette, springing up, and laying an eager hand on her uncle’s shoulder.

“My old friend, Miss Charley—old enemy, I should have said—still unmarried?” Ruthven Erle asked, when Miss Vaughan’s plan had been cordially assented to.

“Can you doubt it? Or imagine her condescending to marry any man upon earth?” returned Miss Vaughan.

“Hardly. You must know her, Amy—Miss Charles Anne Goodfellow. Then would extremes meet, you delicate model of womanhood. A manly creature, manner, voice, height, mind. Very handsome withal. A man in all things, save her supreme contempt for our sex.”

“You forget her housekeeping attainments,” suggested Miss Vaughan.

“Is she educated?” Amy inquired.

"In a Kentucky *convention*; her father says. I wonder the nuns admitted her."

"Is she a lady?" Fadette asked; then blushed, aware that the question was not over-polite.

"She is Charley Goodfellow, *sui generis*," Miss Vaughan answered, kindly coming to her relief; "and so exceptional is the genus, that I believe you will not once think of seeking mannerism refinement. The father is an extremely plain man, who began life with one negro and a wood-yard on the river. The mother died long since, and the daughter grew up as the forest-trees grow, until two or three years ago she chose to go away to a convent for training. She is a good, though eccentric, mother to her young brother, and fairly idolizes, after her own fashion, her elder, in honor of whose return on leave she gives the evening."

"And does the elder brother—" began Amy.

"We shall see what we shall see," oracularly interposed Mr. Erle; "only don't, my dear Amy, begin too desperate a flirtation, lest I find it a duty to despatch myself with all possible speed to Weir."

Miss Grahame giggled appreciatingly, perking up her sharp little nose in a manner that quite upset Fadette's gravity, and arranging the folds of her dress, displaying thereby a pretty slippered foot, which evidently belonged to no reserve-corps.

"Oh, Mr. Erle," she said, making a sudden swoop upon him, "you must not leave us now without one of your long visits. After seeing you weekly, as we used, you cannot imagine how ve'y sadly we have missed you. What, you have missed us, too, you were going to say? Ah, but that is so different! Though I am sure we are all unselfish enough to give you up to our country. By the way, I am ve'y much pleased, Mr. Erle, to hear you have lately named

your plantation after one of our greatest men—Gen. Beau-regard. That does credit to your patriotism; indeed it does. Are you fond of the country, Mr. Rutledge? You should not have chosen the winter for your trial of it, but you will like it very much in the spring, I assure you.”

“The country? Charming enough in pastorals, no doubt. But give me a fine landscape in my library, where a lake is beautiful without the inconvenience of crossing, and clouds roll grandly up, unattended by damp and rheum. The face of Nature, forsooth! Young ladies, your mirrors countenance my preference. And what can the voice of the wind, or the murmur of the waters, say half so agreeably as the tones of auld acquaintance, or the cheery chat around the ingleside? As to feathered songsters, not one warbles to compare with my caged mocking-bird here. Depend upon it, Dame Nature created the country but as an instrument for the creation of the city. Am I not right, Miss Vaughan?”

Before Miss Vaughan, slowly raising her eyes from her work, had replied, Miss Grahame hastened with a simper of consciousness to sanction her guest's opinion, that the feminine “human face divine” is certainly the *chef d'œuvre*; in which sentiment the Scotch poet, Robert Burns, agrees with her. And the city of course is the place to see people. So much easier to get up a dance there—and for her part, she was perfectly in love with dancing. Hereditary, that love—her great-grandfather was a Frenchman.

Amy's knitting-ball here opportunely dropped from her lap and rolled toward Fadette, who crossed the room to restore it, whispering, as she leaned over her cousin's chair—

“*Sauve qui peut!* He has my prayers, I can no more. Now that she is setting her forbears on their dancing-feet again, imagination refuses to suggest when *she* may for-

bear. I'll e'en go over to the sofa there, to Mrs. Grahame. She is just the sweetest little woman!"

Fadette sat apart when gentle Mrs. Grahame rose from her side at the fretful entreaty of her little girl, who had been leaning on her lap, rubbing her sleepy half-shut eyes, and now waxed importunate upon mamma to take her to Mammy, while the baby Matoaca ceased her merry cooing to the stranger.

Fadette watched, until the door closed after the neat slight figure with the smooth brown hair, the sweet smile, and soft white hands so tenderly guiding the uncertain steps of the children. Then her attention reverted to the circle round the centre-table.

Amy sat beneath the chandelier, availing herself of every ray of light as she went the slow round of that still intricate, but most customary parlor-work, the soldier's sock. Miss Vaughan plied swift yet careless needles, while her dark eyes were at liberty, now to kindle with interest when she raised them attentively to Mr. Rutledge, now to droop upon the carpet, when Mr. Erle spoke to her earnestly and low.

Amy was replying to Miss Grahame, and no ear less acute than Fadette's could have caught his words—"my letter yesterday—why did you not answer—cruel—"

The color flashed into Miss Vaughan's pale face, as with downcast lashes she listened. Fadette flushed too, but she lifted a book of engravings from the table near, and resolutely fixed her attention upon the village group before her: so fixed, that a moment after, Mr. Erle's voice at her side surprised her into a start.

He claimed half her sofa, and her first impulse was to relinquish the whole. She furtively glanced across at Miss Vaughan's mournfully resolute bowed face, and then up at his—not glad, not utterly wretched, expressing weariness

rather than emotion. And she drew away her dress, silently granting his claim.

Weariness was predominant, as he threw himself back, saying—

“Ah, Sleepy Hollow the Lesser. Be my guardian fairy, will you, for five minutes—five centuries.”

Almost he closed his eyes—so nearly, that Fadette could unobserved observe him.

More changes passed over her countenance than over his, where restlessness presently gave place to a quiet content. It puzzled her more and more. Was it repose after victory? Miss Vaughan’s set mouth said nay to that. Was it submission to defeat? He to submit?

Suddenly he turned, smiling as she hurriedly bent over her engravings.

“That is not the book you were reading,” he said, mischievously.

“How should you know what I was doing? You were asleep.”

“Not exactly. I know by your face that you were reading mine.”

“Light reading, very,” she rejoined, carelessly.

“On the contrary. Now interpret to me.”

“If you will fall asleep again, and let me finish,” she laughed, in confusion.

“Not I. You have too fully roused me,” and he leaned forward, dropping all nonchalance of manner.

“You are too prejudiced to be observant,” he added.

“I know.”

“You deliberately select the glasses through which to read a volume—rose-color for a favorite, and so on.”

“But, Mr. Erle,” she said, deprecatingly, “not many read as you do. Does she to whom you have been talking?”

“Miss Grahame? Are you blind indeed? How can she

read, who begins and ends with great *I*? There is no *u* in her alphabet."

Fadette smiled.

"Did you notice," she said, "how she pronounces 've'y'? That word is the test-oath with me. But I spoke of Miss Vaughan."

His brow darkened, and he returned severely :

"Miss Vaughan—who the deuce—I beg your pardon—ever gave it her—looks through a darkened glass that would discern spots on the very disk of the sun. The spots are there, it is true, but it would be more becoming in her to look at the rays."

Fadette's lip curled.

"Aha, Sir Sun, the rays have failed to sweeten the grapes," she thought.

"Do you give reading-lessons?" she asked.

"No unknown tongues for you, Miss Chicorà. Chirrup away the lays you have learned of old, lest new ones bear a harsher ring. Your book-knowledge of men is safe as theoretical swimming. But one must plunge into the stream to know its strength and depth. And if one finds also its shallows, and the possibility of stemming the current—still, mocking-birds, if by chance they gain the shore, gain it with plumage wet and ruffled. And, panting and wave-tossed, they have no voice to sing their song."

"Yet you use that book-knowledge of men. You read a great deal."

"But am no great reader. Distinction without difference, you think? Not so. Men are studies, books are light reading. The former I prefer, but accept the latter in default of them. Holmes says some people may be used as intellectual tea-pots. Unfortunately, too many, like your Miss Grahame, contain quantities of mysteriously weak infusion, stale with long standing, and are so brimful

that they spout it forth in the most unprovoked manner, will you nill you—leakily copious.”

“Well, thank Fortune, I am no tea-pot,” she laughed.

“I do, most sincerely,” he said gayly, “for burning hot, icily cold, bitter-sweet you would be, all in one moment, in the bursting of a bubble.”

“And now that you have been spouting so bountifully, I’ll go dribble a few drops as my own. Don’t inform on me,” she ended, rising.





CHAPTER XII.

A BALL IN THE BACKWOODS.

"I have grown weary of these windows—sights
Come thick enough and clear enough with thought."

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS.

HALF-PAST five—the ball to open in two hours—and we to make ten Arkansas miles and a bayou! Young ladies, you will be forced to dance with me all night in self-defence, for you will be too late for any other partner."

So said Ruthven Erle, impatiently slashing at the rose-bushes with his whip, as he waited on the gallery, while the girls exchanged last words with Mr. and Mrs. Grahame, who were not going.

"Have mercy upon my poor flowers, for here we are," Miss Vaughan rejoined, descending the steps.

"You will allow me to drive you," he rather affirmed than requested, staying her when she would have passed by to the large carriage.

She answered hurriedly, in a lowered tone—

"I have asked Mr. Rutledge to go with me. If you wish to say any thing further, you can find opportunity this evening. It is in vain, I tell you before."

Without reply, he assisted her into the carriage, and went back to seek Fadette. There she was, very near, half hidden behind those tall rose-trees, pulling away at the roses, her face in as deep a glow as any blossom she

had tossed into her half-raised dress. In her haste, she had forgotten thorns, and one just then gave her a sharp reminder. She held the injured hand in her other, while tears, she scarcely knew for what, glittered on her drooping lashes, and the full red lips were rounded in a half fretful pout.

He watched her an instant unseen. What a child she is still! he thought. And then he asked, gently, whether she would not drive with him—whether she had hurt herself—and might he assist her.

She started and averted her head, dashing the drops from her eyes as from her blossoms, before she faced him brightly, twining a rose-tendril in her hair, and saying that she believed it would be gayer in the carriage with all the rest, as Monsieur wore his philosopher frown this evening. Nothing at all was the matter—or—yes, she had a thorn in her hand—which she would keep, for she rather liked the tribe, she ended with a smile.

He looked at her fixedly, and she seemed to feel it, for her color deepened yet more. In a moment, he had turned on his heel and left her. She caught his muttered "Fool, to seek for aught but coldness or caprice in woman!"

The tear-drops were not all gone. She brushed another contemptuously away ere she went to claim her place in the carriage.

"If there are grapes beyond his reach, he fain would stoop for others, that the higher may see there are those to be had for the plucking," she thought, watching him where he stood a moment irresolute beside the buggy.

"Thorne," he cried, suddenly, "come over here and drive one of the ladies. I want your horse. You profit by the exchange, old fellow."

In this view of the case, Mr. Thorne, a late acquisition

to the party in the person of a young soldier, fully coincided, and surrendered the handsome bay, that, as Ruthven Erle vaulted into the saddle, was off in an instant, impatient as his rider.

Fadette could not help looking after him admiringly, as he galloped by. For, ever since, and mayhap ages before, "the young Lochinvar rode out of the west," ideal gallants "so faithful in love and so dauntless in war," have ridden into the lists on fiery steeds, with ringing spur and flashing steel. Sydney Smith suggests the introduction of military dolls into the nursery, to harden the heart feminine. But with soldiers alone, in these days at least, it will not toy, and the battle-worn gray, duly brass-buttoned, or with few pretensions to regulation uniformity, boasts truer glitter under Southern sun than any golden fleece of the herd that would tamely submit to the shearing.

Night had closed in before the ten miles were passed, and the bayou gained. Waveless and almost currentless, this was soon crossed in the large flat into which the two carriages were driven. But a few strokes of the oars by the negroes in waiting, impelled it from the one bank where trees and bushes dipping low in the water shut out the forest solitudes, to the other, where, through a few great oaks in the clearing, shone forth festive lights.

The moon, too, threw light upon the straight pathway in the grass, to a log-cabin, in form resembling the Sleepy Hollow homestead, save that here the walls were of rough-hewn logs, the interstices filled in with mud—an unfailing cement, to judge by the state of the roads. These had recalled to Fadette, as the carriage plunged through them, traditions of Arkansas, in which the driver of the third stratum of mules and wagon is heard suffocatedly to object to a fourth passing over unseeing.

Ruthven Erle walked up with Fadette to the house, in

order to post her to some indispensable extent, as he declared, in backwoods etiquette.

"Do you know the received formula for dancing invitations? Hear then, and mark! Some dashing soldier—not a few are spending their Christmas furlough in the vicinity, besides your most obedient—will come up to inquire, 'Want to dance?' You are familiar with the style in which to reply, so far as down-look and up-look, and smile, but you must also say, 'Don't care if I do.' Upon which, you will be requested to git up and shake yourself. This may be accomplished thus: three bobs to a courtesy—now remember—double-shuffle, and pigeon-wing on light fantastic. You can jump rope? Then you will do as far as dancing is concerned."

"I'll watch and imitate your performances."

"No. I am *en philosophe* to-night, as you said. Poor Thorne was in despair at having none but very extensive cavalry boots, so he stepped into mine, while I enter the cavalry, great flaps, bell-spurs, and all, as you may both see and hear."

"Is it possible he has as small—"

"It is very possible he has as small. And now tell me—canst, as 'to the manner born,' discuss spinning, warp, and filling, recipe for persimmon beer, when the water will be up, the last barbecue, and Tom, Dick, or Harry in Mr. Price's or Ben McCullough's foot-company? And last, but by no means least, the pre-eminence of Scotch snuff over this, that, and the other? No? Then you won't be heavy on conversation," he pronounced gravely, shaking his head.

Fadette laughed. "What in the world has snuff to do with these latter days?" she asked. "And *vous connaissez-vous* on all these topics?"

"Both queries I leave you to answer, as here we are on the field of your conquests to be."

For hark ! the combined harmony of fiddle, triangle, and banjo, with occasional warwhoop accompaniment from the dusky, grinning banjo-player, perched in a corner above the heads of his musical brethren. The guests entered a long, lofty, bare apartment, where partitions, reaching only half-way to the roof, and the roof itself unceiled, and crossed by heavy time-darkened beams, would seem to present a glimpse of primitive times in this primeval forest.

About fifty persons, young and old, were there. Two double sets had already formed, and to their movements Fadette directed her attention, anxious concerning the three bobs and a courtesy-feat. There was much more action than in circles polite, yet not unfrequently accompanying grace. Elephantine gambols certainly, those executed by Colin the heavy, or that greenfinch girl scarce lighter. But it is truly astonishing to behold the young soldier in cavalry boots mount in air and descend to earth swift as eyes can follow or fiddle play, with never a jar upon his puncheon heavier than the fall of thistle-down. And the figures following upon each other without a moment's pause or the hum of conversation, were many of them new to Fadette, and struck her fancy.

While some among the dancers were simply and well dressed, others might have stepped from gaudy fashion-plates, four or five years behind the times. In garments masculine, Confederate gray prevailed—black swallow-tail and unpretending jeans being confined to the elderly part of the community. The girls were pretty, for those few among them who had the bayou complexion, muddy as its waters in time of overflow, had veiled it beneath that powder which has done to death many a brave at a ball. Soft white hands and easy manners, generally companions,

were not rare, for Southern women of whatever grade have little manual labor to perform.

Those who did not dance were grouped around on benches, or the usual split-bottomed chair—rocking-chairs being seats of honor. Here a couple of serious small planters, oblivious of festivities, were absorbed in the discussion of war-news, as contained in their last paper, a week old. There an elderly dame in neat black silk sat vigorously swaying to and fro, quite as interested in the dance as the little white-headed girl upon her knee, who, with chubby finger in mouth, stared intent upon the wild “sashé” of that gaudy greenfinch sister. Numbers of the middle-aged women had drawn from their pockets small bottles or boxes, furnished with correspondingly small brushy sticks, which they rubbed in their mouths, first dipping up the yellow-brown powder in the bottles. This was snuff-dipping—not at all confined to the elders save at a party, when young girls hesitate to display their passion. But among the wall-flowers was one apart in the corner the entire evening, who drew no such distinctions, but plied her stick until one ceased to wonder at the snuffy tint of hair and skin, or that no one asked her to dance, any more than they would a jar of the best Scotch. She meantime was quite content, fixedly regarding the dance, as if dancing, after dipping, were the one serious business of life—from time to time hitching herself up on her chair, bracing mind and body to the comprehension of figures.

Without the back windows waved a cluster of black faces, shining eyes, and white teeth displayed from ear to ear. The house and quarter negroes congregated to see the dancing of the “white folks,” among whom “our Miss Charley” rose pre-eminent.

“So you uns had to pull up stakes in Car’lina, and make

tracks for our country," was the greeting of the gray-haired ruddy host, fixing Mr. Rutledge with his quick, light-blue eye, after making the party heartily welcome to the "aversions" of the evening.

"I reckon you find all mighty different here. Not cleared and settled up like the old States. Never been thar myself—raised in Mississippi—but heerd it was a hard country, two rocks to one dirt, like our hills ont yonder."

Mr. Rutledge explained with becoming gravity that the two-rocks-to-one-dirt quality was confined to his hills also. On his coast plantation was raised the finest Sea Island cotton.

"I wonder!" was the old man's exclamation,—inquiring next whether it was because the Yankees had "evaded" the place, that Mr. Rutledge removed his people. "Astonishing how them Yankees always are the hardest kind of masters, though now they make out like the almighty dollar wa'n't shucks to the almighty nigger. High time white folks was a gitting out from among them. Union and Old Flag indeed! Can't come that shenanigan over me! Union been played out for a coon's age, and as to the old flag; since them 'publicans taken it into their dirty hands, its something I ain't got no use for. New tricks are a heap better than the devil's threadbare coat, if it did once belong to respectable people. We'll go it alone if we do git euchred; but I reckon we'll slam them at this game, and go laps into the next war they've a mind to try on. Them 'publicans 'll be streaking it out of the little end of the horn yet, sure. Don't the Scriptures prophesy it? And no fear of Arkansas going up the spout, when Mr. Price's got a whole company of infootry up thar in Missonrah."

Fadette, her hand still in Mr. Erle's arm, stood talking to a tall, handsome, broad-shouldered lass, with a twinkle of quiet humor in her well-opened blue eyes, and a large

firm mouth, that, when she smiled, liberally displayed very white large teeth. Her voice was rich and deep—manly, though low. And there was a suggestion of manliness also in the easy, quiet manner with which she received her guests, and in the grasp of the firm white hand, which, after for an instant covering Fadette's, met Ruthven Erle's with such frank friendliness of greeting. Very graceful, after its determined way, was the wave of the chestnut hair back from the broad square forehead, and far from inelegant the flow of the close-fitting, fine black-and-white homespun. Fadette forgot to ask herself, as she listened, "Is she a lady?" For she was, indeed, "Charley Goodfellow, *sui generis*."

"Yes," she was saying in reply to Mr. Erle, "it just came to the issue I prophesied you last April, when you left for the war. I waited on my brother for two weeks after that; then, in utter desperation, determined he should crawlfish no longer. I shouldered my shot-gun, and so marched out, where he sat on the gallery, reckoning up the votes he might expect for the captaincy of the new company. And in spite of a muttered hint to paddle my own canoe, we had then and there a thorough explanation,—he or I must and should go to Virginia, and that at once. Not that he wished to play out of the fight—he is afraid of nothing in this round world," she went on with a proud lifting of the head—"but he waited to go in as an officer. As if there needed stars on a man's collar to show him the enemy, or gold-lace bars to fight behind! But thus, in a fright for me, he put out in time for Manassas."

"But you did not really mean it?" half-questioned Fadette, surveying her in bewilderment.

"I did that," she returned; "I won't have the last one of the family out here in the woods, so many bumps on a log. My father is too old, Johnny too young. So long as

my elder brother does his duty there, mine is here. Perhaps it may be, at all events, with my father and Johnny to look after," she ended, almost with a sigh.

"But what could you do in the army?"

"Mr. Erle there can tell you if his gun has brought down more deer than mine—if he rides a wilder horse or leaps a wider ditch. I am not afraid to chirp, I assure you, even if there is no down here," and she stroked her chin in manly fashion,—a gesture which Fadette afterward found she often used unconsciously.

"True enough, Miss Charley," assented Mr. Erle. "But why, since you thought of joining the army, did you not do so under your gallant captain, whom I left striving so unceasingly to enlist you?"

She opened her mouth rather wide for the low laugh, rubbing her hands together gleefully.

"Routed completely—worse than Bull Run Races," she replied. "The poor fellow abandoned his siege-guns and fled, not daring to beg quarter. This was the way of it. My father and Sol took it into their heads he would be a good match for me—well-looking, river place, thirty hands, a step above our position in society—all that sort of thing. Even Johnny, poor boy, was given to muttering of old maids. So here was the gentleman forevermore, tinkering about my spinning-wheel, following me to the dairy, and would doubtless have penetrated into the mysteries of butter and curd, if I had only said the word. At first I tried possuming—was blind, deaf, dead, to every advance. But that was not in my line, and I determined to get the dead-wood on him. 'Twas hard—I like the creature, if only he had not pestered me out of my life. But however hard, it had to be done. So one morning I ordered him out hunting. And a rare chase it was, I warrant you. All through the woods on my red Lightning—loping along like mad, plung-

ing into the thickest of the canebrake, firing at random dangerously near my sportman's head, he the while the perfect impersonation of the frog in the fable, 'fun to you'—shouting and hallooing—how I wished I dared swear too—swimming the bayou which was running strongly from the overflow—and bringing him up in the evening floundering in the slough behind the quarter. That was my last view. He went to Virginia the next day. That taught what I had been assuring him for months—that we were no showing for a match, and that there were nicer and prettier girls would yoke with him much better. I paid for the lesson myself with a severe chill, but thought the affair cheaply settled, as my father and brother just came to the conclusion that I would never pull in double harness, and that I had no more use for a husband than the Mississippi has for a sail-boat. If ever I see him again, and he is married—for he's certain now to fall in love with some soft little creature who, for worlds, would not mount any horse but his own hobby, and who only knows the report of a pistol in his battle-stories—I'll e'en go up to him, explain why I did it all, and beg his pardon."

"But he is one of the best of fellows," remonstrated Mr. Erle, much amused. "Had you taken him in hand, you might have made what you chose of him."

"Why should I attempt the task? As to making anything of him, churning through all eternity won't make butter come in an empty churn."

At that moment advanced the host, arm in arm with an individual who claims attention, were it only for his uniform, gotten up regardless of blockade, in lavish expenditure of buttons and gold lace, and for the conscious pride with which he regarded both it and himself.

A tall, broad-shouldered, loose-jointed figure, on which the Confederate coat looked much as if it had dropped,

reversing Elijah's mantle, from a lesser to a greater. A broad, heavy-featured countenance, over which forty rugged winters had begun to cast their shadows in stray lines as rugged. A large, good-natured, vacillating mouth, and fine teeth. Eyes of a peculiar dark wood-color, with perchance a slight reflection of the foliage tints—yet more peculiar in their power of darting forward with his head and shoulders, whenever speech became emphatic. A most *empresé* manner, a low confidential tone, now and then hurried and jerky. A perfect mane of dark hair, from time to time shaken back with a spirited toss of the head, surmounted all. And this all, Lieutenant Solomon Goodfellow—in familiar parlance, Sol—him the proud old man presented to Fadette, and by him was her hand impressively requested for the dance.

“A compromise between a war-horse and a sand-crab,” Fadette whispered to Ruthven Erle, while her partner went his way to order a change of tune. “Did you ever behold such eyes? They jump at one so, they would absolutely terrify, were it not for their very inoffensive expression.”

“Come, young people, stir yourselves round like a six-mule team in a mud-hole,” exhorted the old man, patting his tall daughter on the shoulder, as she moved away.

“She is handsomer every time I see her,” said Mr. Erle, observing the father's eyes follow with evident delight.

“And just as bright as they make 'em,” responded he, rubbing his hands excitedly. “But she'll never meet up with her match in a man, I'm afeard. Why, Sir, there was young Stevens—him that was setting up to her when you went away—kerflummoxed as bad as any man you ever seen. But he!—he wa'n't nowhar. She give him the go-by, kicked him plumb into the middle of last year, she did, and they say the poor boy ain't been off his head since.”

Fadette had much ado to keep her amusement within

bounds of the smile polite, while she returned her partner's profound salaam, and endeavored to keep pace with his *pas de charge*. If he made those dashes upon the enemy, she no longer marvelled at the account he had been giving of himself; single-handed, routing half a dozen in the battle where his bars were won.

"That is very fine," he said, having passed not ingloriously through the hazards of "circle three," and falling back on his first position, unfurling a huge handkerchief, obviously intended for a flag of truce—"splendid exercise—splendid—for us young people. Think so?" was his confidential query, bending low for her reply.

She smiled, as she assented—"Us, young people!" he is older than my guardian!" And there came the memory of a far prison, and her face saddened.

Her partner observed it, and hastened to remove the imagined cause.

"Don't—don't be low-spirited. It would not be wise—would it now?—to give up enjoying this evening because there might not be another for the next three months? Never mind, it may not be long before others of our boys will be back, and then somebody will give an evening, for the ladies are very kind to us. I hope to return myself next fall. That is, if my country can spare my services for a few weeks."

Fadette gravely trusted they would be spared by her being at peace, and he could then retire under the shade of his laurels, which might also afford shelter to his friends.

She was forced to raise her handkerchief to her lips, as, with a toss of that mane, and features working excitedly, he began:

"Yes, that is just what I want, Miss—somebody to share them with. I am a domestic man—a very domestic man—though it might not seem so from my never having mar-

ried. Time enough yet, of course, you say. But I'll tell you—though friends—a great many—have told me I was vain—(I don't know why, unless they judged from my manner, being a man of the world)—yet I never have seen any young lady I thought actually cared very much about me—I have not, really. There are only two things I am particular in looking for. Beauty is a very pretty, nice thing to have—and so are negroes—but heart and mind!—heart and mind!" he reiterated, laying his hand upon the first, and tapping the forehead where cultivation of the latter was supposed to have set its furrows. His eyes the while darted impressively forward, reminding Fadette of the childish days when, playing on the beach, she would tap a captured sand-crab on the back to make him put forth those wondrous organs.

In a pause of the dance, Fadette stole a glance where she had left Ruthven Erle. He had disappeared. There was Amy mingling with the dancers, where Mr. Rutledge too had his place with a young and pretty woman, who had consigned her three-year-old to a friend beside her. Miss Arabella Grahame courtesied, coquetted, ambled, and bridled, quite dazzling the tall, blushing soldier-boy, her partner—occasionally, *en Mademoiselle Oracle*, confounded him. But where was Matoaca Vaughan?

The quadrille, as all things must at last, came to an end, and Fadette had seated herself near a window. For, January though it was, the evening was one of spring's fore-runners, and the blazing logs within-doors rendered the mild air without a luxury. By dint of persevering monosyllables, she had driven her ardent attendant to distant admiration—of himself. And now she sat quite alone, beginning to think the ball a weariness.

She heard footsteps on the gallery outside her window; and the light streaming upon two passing figures, showed

her Ruthven Erle, and Matoaca Vaughan on his arm. His face was toward his companion, averted from Fadette, but of hers she caught one glimpse. There was ineffable mournfulness in the droop of the beautiful head, but the mouth was fixed determinedly. Fadette half-rose to go away. But she could no longer move unseen. He had paused there, speaking in a low, though vehemently reproachful tone—

“Matoaca Vaughan, have you then no fault, that you are so merciless toward the man you love?”

She was silent. Fadette, where she sat, could no longer see reply in her face.

He continued more gently—

“You know the whole truth now. What is past, is past. Then let it go.”

“What is past, is past. The far and near. I let all go.”

That was all. The clear, decided tones were lost as the twain moved on.

The gayer, if less musical, tones of the fiddle were the next she heard. And then the eager ones of young Thorne, asking her to dance.

That drive began his conquest, that dance achieved it. Never before had Fadette appeared so bright, so gay, so altogether charming. The dark-blue silk set off the carmine glow of her cheek and the sparkle of her eyes. Every motion of the lithe figure was grace itself. And with what witchery the tiny foot, cased in its slight black boot, danced its way right into all hearts, and left its impress there—but most of all in that of her *ci-devant* driver! Even the snuff-maiden, whom Fadette called, in answer to her partner’s suggestion, “not a Lone Star, but a whole constellation—the Dipper”—slipped her bottle into her pocket, engrossed in watching, and even relaxed into a smile, moved by the inspiration of Fadette’s ringing laughter.

Matoaca, all serene, was deep in converse with Mr. Rut-

ledge. Ruthven Erle lounged in the doorway, alone, in no enviable frame of mind, to judge from the moody glances following Fadette, as she glided through the quadrille, now turning her head for a last word with her partner, now listening to his, with a smile, or that pretty lifting of the brows which was Fadette's alone.

It was the first time her will-o'-the-wisp character had flashed out so clearly. Lingered home-sickness, the restraint of unfamiliar faces, absence of excitement, had obscured the fairy-fire, and forced it to plod along in the path marked out for it, instead of flitting aside, and sparkling, and alluring after its own wayward wont. But music, however homely, made her heart keep time, and a certain naughty resolve, as she observed Ruthven Erle's unconcealed disappointment on finding her engaged in the dance, added yet another excitement.

So he stood there, sarcastically compassionating the deluded Thorne, congratulating himself upon superior wisdom, calling her in his heart an arrant little flirt.

Was he just? Are there not women who can no more help being "wo to men" than can the whirlpool avoid drawing on the adventurous billow? And those cruel Venus's Fly-Traps are not *muiaophagi* in malice prepense, but devour their hovering prey by law of nature.

Yet, weary perhaps of the rôle of door-keeper, he joined the buzzing circle round her at the conclusion of the set, and requested the honor of her hand for the next.

"Mine is the first claim, Mr. Erle," Lieutenant Sol hastened to interpose.

Mr. Erle, looking quite over him, repeated his request, as if he had not heard a word.

Ere Fadette could reply, the brilliant Sol—"Phœbus! what a name!"—reminded that he had the first claim, having asked her just as Mr. Erle came up.

"And I had not answered. Neither of you gentlemen have a claim—(Sol certainly not the shadow"—she added, to herself). "And I'll dance with whomsoever I will," she ended, laughingly.

The whomsoever represented Mr. Erle, until she distinguished a slight smile of certainty curling his lip. She accepted Mr. Goodfellow's arm, and they took their places at the head of the set.

Ruthven Erle, with a lazy shrug, turned away. And seeing Amy disengaged, he said, in passing, "Keep yourself for me, Amy;" then moved on to a short distance, and leaning against the wall, proceeded to disencumber himself of the melodious Texan spurs.

The fiddler still tuning up, there was silence through the room. Many eyes had been fixed upon the two candidates for the honor of Fadette's hand, and the young men, Mr. Thorne in especial, had been greatly surprised at Mr. Erle's quiet acquiescence. Therefore, when he drew aside, and portentously raised and examined his boot, that not unusual receptacle for pistols, the general conclusion arrived at was, that something was "up."

A frightened twitter among the women, and then a hurried shuffling, and barricades hastily constructed of chairs, benches, etc., proved that the anticipated something was nothing less than a cavalry charge.

The gallant lieutenant, following the direction of everybody's stare, and suddenly arresting himself on the field of Manassas, in a headlong dash he was describing to Fadette, was ware of the demonstrations opposite, first observed by all save the sleepy complacent fiddler twanging away with half-shut eyes.

Imagining himself, perhaps, still upon the field of honor, he flung himself forward into the centre of the room. First, by an elevation of the coat-tails, he revealed a pistol hol-

ster, from which he drew the weapon, flourishing it, and planting himself firmly in a defensive attitude, as one defying the armies of Israel this day. "Come on, and I will give your flesh," etc.

All this had passed in an instant. And how much longer Ruthven Erle, who in one quick glance had taken in the position of affairs, and who now bit his lip to conceal his amusement, while searching in the capacious boot-top for the pistol every bystander was looking for—how much longer he might have chosen to keep up the farce, cannot be known. For, at this moment, the maiden in green broke away from all detaining friendly hands, and, heedless of terrified warnings and expostulations, scaled, at a flying leap, all the barricades in the far corner, and with dishevelled locks and flaming cheeks rushed forward and threw herself into the breach.

"You shan't touch him—you shan't," she shrieked, shrilly. "If you want to come at him, you'll have to tramp over *my* dead bo-o-ones!"

And she precipitated herself, howling, upon Ruthven Erle, who, all unprepared for so overwhelming a force, had considerable difficulty in preserving his equilibrium. The rafters rang again with his shout of uncontrollable mirth, as he endeavored to shake her off, while a dozen of the brave of the sex, emulating her zeal, or beginning to suspect a joke, pressed round.

Fadette and Amy, in blissful ignorance of pistols ever being carried in boots, stared, unable to comprehend the scene. Mr. Goodfellow stood aloof, coolly demanding fair play, and checking those who would have interfered. Mr. Rutledge, who knew Ruthven Erle, and young Thorne, who knew the boots and their innocence of pistols, were perfectly convulsed with laughter.

At this juncture, and while the terrified damsel's screams

yet mingled in the merriment, entered Miss Charley, who had the while been absent, "on hospitable thoughts intent."

With one or two imperative questions to the girls, she elicited a dozen contradictory answers in a breath, from all of which she judged nobody knew any thing.

"There, there, that will do," she said. Then, with a quick movement, was beside the howling maiden, had grasped her by the shoulder, and with one swing left her standing in the middle of the room, where she presently tottered into her *protégé's* brandished arms.

"You—you—Thing!" Charley said, contemptuously—"cannot you see you are egging them on? Mr. Erle, what is this all about? I can learn the truth from you."

He held aloft an immense spur which he had now unstrapped.

"Just about this, Miss Charley. There is apparently some mysterious objection to my relieving myself of my spurs to dance. I do assure you, young ladies, it has as yet slain no one at all. But if ever another hundred-and-fifty pounder be levelled at me, I won't answer for the consequences." And he brandished the spur threateningly.

Charley's hearty laugh set an example all followed. The gallant lieutenant magnanimously shook hands with the knight of the spur. Peace and gayety once more reigned, and the dance proceeded, until, with a word from his daughter—

"Supper's next in the procrum, ladies and gentlemen," announced Mr. Goodfellow.

"Pro-cram, indeed!" thought Fadette, taking her seat at a long table, between the numberless dishes of which scarcely could a glimpse of the snowy cloth be seen. A haunch of venison; a shoat in shining brown coat; huge wild-turkeys; wild-goose; teal-ducks; partridges; black-birds; great white or yellow sweet-potatoes, of which two

filled a dish; cakes, pies, and pyramids of sugar-candy; biscuit and light-bread, with golden piles of butter; preserves, and cream in bright glass pitchers; and sparkling jellies of the wild Muscadine grape, flanked by decanters of Muscadine wine, home-made,—were all ranged there, not without a certain rude tastefulness, and decorated, where that tastefulness admitted, with violets and roses white and red.

“Now, gentlemen,” Mr. Goodfellow said, crossing his arms upon the table, and nodding to a servant—“now, gentlemen, I’ll show you what’s what. Here’s some fine old wine our kind friend Mr. Grahame sent to make merry with. Bor—Bor—well, it do look like ducks,” he added, peering sidelong at the bottle held close to his eyes; “and I reckon we’ll be barking up the right tree if we drink it with our duck.”

Upon the host’s declaring it would be a sin to take such wine just as if it were persimmon beer, and they were ashamed to say any thing about it, various toasts accompanied; Mr. Rutledge’s—“The West, where the wise men followed the Lone Star”—occasioning three times three, and the very original proposal from a shrill youth, to “take half-a-dozen cheers and sit down.”

When, at the close of the last dance, dawning light and chill breeze heralded the coming sunrise, Fadette, wrapped in a warm shawl, paced the gallery with Ruthven Erle. All the will-o’-the-wisp sparkle was faded from her eyes, she looked weary, and scarcely tried to suppress a yawn. She watched those dull red streaks, wavering between the low murky line of cloudland above, foreboding no bright day, and the low murky line of woodland below, to which white mists rolling up gave the semblance of clouds. There swept over her the memory of such a sunrise once

seen from the deck of the Louisiana, nearing Old Point. Strange, her heart had been lighter then, she sighed unconsciously.

"What is it?" asked Ruthven Erle, who watched her face.

"Nothing—but— Oh, I am so homesick, Mr. Erle!" she cried, compressing her lip in the effort to control her tears, and that painful swelling in the throat. And when he drew the cold little trembling hand within his arm, holding it there with a firm and tender grasp, she turned away her head, and shivered like an aspen-leaf.

But the next instant she put a strong constraint upon herself; for Miss Goodfellow had approached, walking beside Mr. Thorne, having declined his arm.

"Let me deliver up your escort," she said to Fadette; "I have piloted him through all perils to the haven where he would be." And she turned to answer Mr. Erle.

"Good-morning, Mr. Thorne," Fadette cried gayly. "But are you sure you are awake? I would not vouch for you."

"Eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-star," he quoted in an aside, with significant shrug toward Charley.

"Fie! is she not a friend of yours?"

"Far from it. A friend of my brother's. I am a comparative stranger in the county."

"Yes," said Charley, facing round with an amused smile, which at once set Fadette to wondering whether she could possibly have overheard the low-toned colloquy. "Mr. Thorne is a shove-out from Missouri. So renowned a jayhawker throughout the length and breadth of her prairies—"

"Miss Charley! Miss Charley!" interposed Mr. Erle, who perceived the color rising angrily in his friend's bronzed cheek; "will you then never learn the distinction between partisan-leader and jayhawker? And is it needful further

to inform you that it has passed into a byword in many a Missouri camp,

‘Where his Honor pricks,
Let that aye be your bound.’”

Young Thorne stole a gratified though embarrassed glance at Fadette. She surveyed him with awakened interest.

“Oh, Mr. Thorne, have you actually been a partisan-leader?”

He bowed.

“And not one adventure given me? Do you know, having brought you to confession, I have a great mind to make you do penance by now and here beginning at the very beginning, instead of going in search of the carriage, which—Ah, there it comes, behind my uncle’s! Quite a throng in front, however, so you have space to tell me whether you like such adventurous warfare better than that according to rule?”

“Aye, that I do,” he cried enthusiastically. “Since early boyhood I have passed many a vaca—many a summer—hunting in Kansas and the Indian nation, and the roving life has become a second nature.”

“Endless retrospect!” cried Charley with uplifted hands to Mr. Erle. “Since early boyhood! And he twenty!”

Ruthven frowned warningly upon the scoffer of eighteen. And while Harry Thorne, somewhat disconcerted by this running commentary, continued to tell Fadette how he trusted again to go up to Missouri when the leaves should come out, and scare up the whole country at the head of the bushwhackers whom he would recruit there, Ruthven said:

“You are unjust, Miss Charley. That is really a most gallant young fellow. And last spring he was beginning greatly to admire you, when you took this tone with him.”

A smile just curled Miss Charley's red lips. It came with the remembrance of an episode in last spring's history, of an eloquent letter penned at the close of Harry Thorne's month's visit in the county, and of its answer, in due form:

"Mr. Thorne,
I remain,
Charley Goodfellow."

She said carelessly:

"What matter? He will do himself full justice. Has he belittled Jack the Giant-killer, or not? Bushwhacking against regular service, indeed! These independents, looking down on their own footprints on the sand, don't see the way carved on the rocks above. And whatever has been said or sung of 'footprints in the sand,' every one knows that the first wave washes them away. So it is as well to aid in hewing the rocky highway, though it keeps no dint of passing feet. You are laughing? You think I—"

But the carriage interrupted.

Young Thorne claimed Fadette, nor relented for all Mr. Erle's asseverations that the bay was more than he could manage—that he shuddered before the perils of the homeward ride.

"The consequences of being in such hot haste to step into a friend's boots. Retributive justice, I see it sticking out a foot," cried Harry Thorne, waving his cap triumphantly as he assisted Fadette into the buggy.





CHAPTER XIII.

EVENING AT "BEAUREGARD."

"Conversation between friends is just like walking thro' a mountainous kintra—at every glen-mouth the wun' blaws frae a different airt—noo heather-bank, noo a gruesome quagmire."

• ETTRICK SHEPHERD.

COUSIN, cousin, they done come!" cried the little Janet, dancing on tiptoe into Fadette's dressing-room, as that damsel stood surveying herself in the Psyche-glass, adjusting her dark braids for the last time, while her admiring maid held aloft the candelabrum, with an occasional glance at her own dusky reflection.

"Who done come, sweet thing?" asked Fadette, turning, and tossing the child in her arms.

"Oh, whole heap of people. Calling across the lake now, and big flat gone over after them with Cousin Ru'. Come down, coz, and see ever so many flowers mamma done put in the library. And a mighty heap of light, too!"

"All right, Irene?" Fadette asked, as her maid, with connoisseur air, smoothed down the silken folds of her dress. Then she left the room, clasping the tiny outstretched hand, and followed down-stairs by Janet's small playmate and *protégée*, who afterward hung about the hall, peeping in at the doors, all expectancy to share in her mistress's play and "pretties."

"How perfectly beautiful!" exclaimed Fadette on entering the library, looking first at Amy and then at the flowers which she was arranging upon the table, herself a fairer

blossom, in her white rosebud prettiness and pale violet dress.

Mr. Rutledge laid aside his paper, and came forward to assist his daughter in placing the vase upon the mantel.

"Do you belong up there, too?" he asked, pretending to lift her next.

She laughed, and glided behind Fadette.

"Here is our ornament," she said, putting her arm round her cousin's waist.

"Come then, Chicora, here is your opportunity to be looked up to."

"No, I thank you, Sir; no lonely heights for me. I might chance to follow Hans Andersen's china shepherdess, who flung herself down—"

"To the level of the handsome wooden soldier who fell in love with her," mischievously interrupted Amy.

"Wooden—head and all?" she inquired innocently.

Her uncle drew her to him, and said, with an intermingling of seriousness—

"Head, heart, and all, you assume, and so use him for target practice, eh?"

She put up her hands deprecatingly, crying—

"*Ma foi!* 'Cupid hath clapped him o' the shoulder, but I'll warrant him heart-whole.'"

"And I will warrant, since we wax classic, that

'H' had got a hurt

O' th' inside, of a deadlier sort.'"

"Uncle Rutledge! What, in half a dozen interviews?"

"Of whom are you speaking, little one?"

"Why, of Mr. Thorne, of course. Whom else?"

He glanced at her, then quietly took a cigar from the mantel, and proceeded to light it, saying that he would go

down to the lake bank and see what our young delinquent had done with the flat and its freight.

Fadette, as he went out, caught Amy by the waist, and whirled with her round the room, humming the air to which she kept time.

"Oh, what would I not give"—throwing herself giddily into an easy-chair—"for a *bona fide* old-time ball! Can Uncle Wash play waltzes? How many people are coming to-night? A dozen or two? Do you know, I think it is the most charming way in the world of visiting. I only hope they will stay several days—we might have dancing enough then. Do you think Wash knows any thing but those everlasting quadrilles and reels, Amy?"

"I dare say. But," she added, timidly, "if I were you, I would not waltz."

"Not waltz! Are you daft? Why not?"

"Only, people object—"

"Who are 'people?'" Fadette asked, leaning forward anxiously. "Does your mother—Uncle Rutledge? Because, if he—"

"No, no. Only people in general—Ruthven, for instance," Amy interposed, hesitating and blushing.

"Is that all?" Fadette sank back, relieved. "Why, my dear child, you do not for a moment imagine I shall ask his permission? Because you, good soul that you are, glide along in his leading-strings, am I to forget to walk? Besides, methinks both you and I waltzed last night in this very room with the identical Ruthven."

"But that is so different!" remonstrated Amy. "Besides, he does not himself think any thing of waltzing, only of the way in which some people regard it."

Fadette shrugged her shoulders.

"There is the lion in the fairy-tale, Amy. If you gang your ain gate, nor swerve because of its threatening

aspect, you will be very apt to find it a growl-less shadow."

"Ah, cousin mine," cried Amy, "wait only until some one has a claim on your dancing! Then we shall see independence!"

"And did you not dance when you were engaged?" Fadette asked, quickly.

"That was so short a time—the war had already commenced, and there was no question of that."

"But—but—" Fadette said, desperately, the guilty color surging to her brow—"when—before—"

She broke off, ashamed of her intention.

Amy's blushes were as vivid.

"We will not speak of that, please," she answered, gently. "Though not a year has passed, it is but a dream—yet a somewhat painful one. We had both 'lightly turned to thoughts of love,' and both had to learn the wide gulf between fancy and feeling. That he first saw it, was hardly a fault."

"But—" began Fadette, flushed and indignant.

Amy stopped her with a kiss.

"Hush," she said, meeting the abashed eyes with hers of calm, clear, truthful blue—"No blows aimed at my kindred, you Don Quixote. Vanity suffered from a scratch, that is all. He really behaved well, save and except the crime of falling in love out here. And who would not absolve him, having seen Miss Vaughan?"

Fadette, still coloring hotly, hastened to resume with forced gayety:

"Well, *revenons à notre mouton*—we won't demoralize him—I, for one, will waltz with him no more."

"Oh! and this his last evening!" began Amy, distressed.

"There! there is the click of the front gate. Your prettiest smile, *ma bien-aimée*, for here are our guests."

"Amy," said Mrs. Rutledge, entering at this moment, "go into your father's study, my child, and weigh out fifteen grains of quinine for Candace. Her husband is there waiting for it."

"Is she much sick, Mamma?" asked Amy, rising.

"Not very. No fever when I was in the quarter, an hour ago. Make the quinine into pills, Amy. Servants are so bad about taking it!"

"Let me go, Aunt Janet. Indeed, I prefer making pills to receiving people," cried Fadette, vanishing as voices and footsteps sounded upon the front gallery.

"So! caught peeping!" said a voice behind Fadette, when, half an hour later, she stood without upon the gallery, reconnoitring through the window the scene in the parlor, which she yet hesitated to enter alone.

She started.

"Why, where did you come from?" she asked, on seeing Mr. Erle.

"From no more mysterious retreat than yon dark corner of the gallery, toward which you did not think fit to glance. May I ask what your ladyship is doing here?"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you, Mr. Erle! You must go with me into the parlor. I have been dreading it alone. I scarcely know any one there."

"Is the bashful, then, your *rôle* to-night?"

"A most uncomfortable one. Don't you think some inventive genius should benevolently devote himself to a patent for launching people into drawing-rooms? I can float on wave or calm of conversation with other small craft, but as to getting there!"

"I'll launch you, then. For what harbor will you have me steer?"

"Tell me first who are here. My ideas of Arkansas

society are completely upset. I had taken one backwoods ball as the criterion, but the backwoods, it seems, end here."

"Of course. Stay, there is a group you know—Miss Vaughan and Charley Goodfellow, and 'Bella, horrida Bella!'"

"Is not Mr. Thorne come?"

"Look again—next Amy's sofa. Shall we bear down upon them?"

"That would be an idea! Let us go to Miss Charley Goodfellow," she said.

She moved forward, and he gave her his arm. They reached the hall-door—and passed it. He drew her on silently.

"Well!" she exclaimed, after a short pause of astonishment.

"What is the use?" he asked, coolly continuing the walk. "Who will miss us in ten minutes? No, do not loiter by the windows."

"Then are you furnished with a topic so engrossing that it shall render me oblivious of them?"

"Not while you glance thus toward them, and let the music creep in between my words. I am in dire fear lest, if my topic interest not, you flit away."

Her eyes fell on the gleaming lake, and the island lying darkly silent, the trees at the point throwing quivering shadows half across.

"How strangely far thoughts journey with a word!" she said. "I seemed to stand again, as I stood a year ago last fall, upon the shores of a Swiss lake, an island thus on its bosom. Only, there through the oaks the moon streamed on a rudely painted wall which pictured a memory of Tell, and a gray ruin gloomed from the island, down on sweet Lake Lowerz. Thus, when my guardian spoke as you but now, I cried: A legend, then—a legend!"

"And you think Arkansas can furnish none?"

"I do indeed, since the first settlers here are still middle-aged. Tales, like wines, improve with age."

"Then mine shall be antediluvian. Will you let me wander to a distance for its beginning, assured that I will bring you safely here at last? Listen, then—we'll put Swiss tradition to the blush.

"You know how, scores of centuries ago, over this world pale faces call the new, the Great Spirit brooded with outstretched golden wings, above his nest in the Red Quarry of the north. On a sudden, through the deep tranquillity, in the glory which his wings shed on the earth, his eagle glance descried the slippery folds of a mighty serpent coiling toward the nest. The Great Spirit swooped downward, and his talons wrenched away a fragment of the red pipe-stone, and hurled it at the treacherous reptile. In the crash, some pebbles fell away from the mass, and struck the serpent's writhing tail, and rattled, as he would have slunk away. From that moment he and his numerous progeny have never glided toward their prey without that warning rattle. But the mass of stone descended to the cliff below, and in the fall, was shapen to the semblance of the red-man. The Great Spirit beheld, and grieving that he should stand there solitary, cast down another fragment—thus man and woman stood together on the rock. A glittering feather with that movement floated from his wings, and woman and the sun were given to the earth together. But the sun sank behind the distance, and the Great Spirit winged his way so high within his nest of clouds, that only through the meshes flashed those gleaming plumes, in sparkles we call stars. And while the world lay in midnight, the wily serpent crept again along the cliff, and with revengeful fangs gnawed and gnawed the feet of the two beings fastened there, and prostrated them

side by side. But in the moment that the sun arose and touched them with his vivifying rays, they rose up too, and wandered hand in hand together.

"They reached the river's marge, and there, within the glow upon the water, tossed a light canoe of birchen bark. Within it lay, as fair as any Indian Mandan maid, one with gold hair streaming over her slight form, and blue eyes fixed upon them, beckoning them on. Thus, for centuries, this Spirit of the red-men's fortune led the tribes to and fro along their great rivers, from time to time appearing to them. But when contention rose upon the sacred ground of the Red Quarry, where the Great Spirit had smoked the pipe of peace above the hunter-tribes, she paled and paled away, and beckoned to her favored Mandans, guiding them from the Ohio's shores, on and up the turbulent Missouri. Then they never saw her more. She had heard afar the white man's tread upon the hallowed spot the red-man first profaned with blood, and as he trampled on that stone from which the Great Spirit had created the red-man, and which was therefore flesh of the Indian's flesh, thus trodden under foot, she could foresee the fate of all those warrior-tribes in years to come. So the light canoe turned back away, and floated down the stream again. Groups of hunters on the bluffs caught now and then the flash of her bright hair, the gleam of her blue eyes, and would have followed, as of old. But evermore she waved them back again, seeing with prophetic vision how the pale-face race would press them westward, from their ancient mounds and hunting-grounds.

"She reached the rushing current of the Mississippi. Down she floated still, and here—aye, in this very lake—was seen of mortal man for the last time.

"A wondrous while she had been drifting down, sometimes so slowly, that to know that she had moved at all, one must have watched for years on years. But now at

length, one moonlit night like this, the strange bark entered this cove, then but a bend in the great river. For the narrow fields which now divide the waters from the waters, were then but gradually gaining ground.

"This lake was one vast gleaming crescent, when the boat glided slowly along that island's further shore. She lay within it, motionless. The eyes which had guided like the pilot-stars so long, were waning faint and dim, as if their watch was over. The hand so long stretched out to point the way, was lying listless at her side. The golden hair was fading like the Indian's day. Yet still its radiance outshone the moon, and as she passed the bank, flung a glory on the ripples.

"Beneath the oaks cresting yonder point of the island, lounged at rest a group of men. Sombreros shaded here a bronzed French or Spanish countenance, and there a florid Saxon. The singular haphazard air of the men's dress, which yet was often rich, and sometimes splendid, had much of incongruity with these wild solitudes. Against that thorn-tree, glossy in the moonbeams, flashed a stand of carbines. And here was moored a richly-laden flatboat. Who its crew, or where, might not be known, but blood-stains darkled on the planks, and less than a seer, with knowledge of these waters, would have cried: A part of Maçon's banditti—who lay in wait for venturous craft bound to the Gulf.

"Meantime, the enchanted bark skimmed on. But that golden gleam had touched the dreamful lids of one who lay beneath the trees. Up he sprang, and with a shout awoke the echoes. For far more beautiful than any dream, she passed.

"He leaned out toward her, but she never turned to look on him. And then while all his comrades started up to watch, he struck out boldly into the waves in her wake.

"There—midway from the point—where that weird bough up-clutches like a skeleton arm, he gained on the canoe—was stretching forth to grasp—

"The fading eyes turned then. From out their depths swept one last fire of vengeance on the usurpers of the red-man's lands. It scathed him where he rose. A shriek appalled the night. And down he sank, down, down—the waters whelmed him fast—and of the ruthless bandit there remained but that wild arm outstretched to clutch the empty waves forevermore—that arm shrivelled and enchanted to the semblance of a blasted branch. On glided the canoe, close by the shores of this fair chute, while the robbers stood there, horror-struck."

"Horror-struck! I should think so! You have made me as much afraid of the moonbeams as of the dark," she cried, with a playfully affected shiver.

He laughed, and stopped before the window.

"Reconnoitre, then," he rejoined, "and we will go in."

"Mr. Erle, what a lovely tableau!" Fadette cried, as her glance wandered round the room.

His followed, to where, in the bow-window opposite, sat a very pretty girl blushing listening to the low speech of a very young soldier.

"You do not know her?" he asked. "It is Miss Eva Leigh, twentieth cousin to her *fiancé*, in whom you have doubtless recognized the younger brother of your Mr. Thorne. Both brothers, beardless knights as they are, have fairly won their spurs under our glorious Price. This one was almost brought up in the family of his cousin, who is also his guardian. You see a rare instance of boy and girl attachment standing the test of separation. Rather a short test as yet, however."

While Fadette stood embarrassed, as if these last words were spoken in direct reference to herself, the curtain

shadowing her face was drawn aside, and Miss Goodfellow turned in merry indignation upon Ruthven Erle.

"There, there," she cried; "why should you take it for granted every pumpkin's empty, because there's never a seed in your head to rattle? When you do slip up on one that is really mellowing in the sun, must you throw your shadow over, and wonder what is gone with the sunshine?"

Ruthven laughed.

"You a believer in that sunshine, Miss Charley?" he said.

"It *is* rather a new wrinkle in me," she returned, carelessly throwing her arm over the back of her chair.

"And how came you ensconced here in this pussy-wants-a-corner fashion?" he inquired.

Charley held up to view a newspaper, then let it fall again at her side.

"Ours miscarried this week," she said. "Ah, Mr. Erle, that affair of Dranesville! Should it not warn us that a tallow-candle has been driven through heart of oak by putting abundance of powder behind? We need all our bark to the fore, to keep off the bite of even beetles."

Ruthven Erle threw down upon the window-seat the cards he had taken from it, idly shuffling them.

"It is a game," he said, in which clubs are trumps. Ours are skilfully played, and if we hold not too few—"

"You do not fear, surely!"

"For ultimate freedom, never. But the hand in which I figure as deuce of clubs, may possibly be played out before the game is ours."

"Mr. Erle, have you thought so from the first?" cried Fadette.

"From the first. You are surprised? You would not

have me stand still, well-preserved as Madame Lot, through looking behind for flames which might follow?"

"No, no—eyes to the front!" cried Charley, while her own, which had been roving from group to group, returned to him with a sparkle of humor. "Only see—a desperate flirtation, is it not? Miss Arabella is in the midst of a detailed account of the battle of Oak Hill, to Harry Thorne, who was in it."

Fadette caught Mr. Thorne's quizzical appeal.

"Why does no one," she said, "make her see the absurdity of those disquisitions?"

Charley smiled, throwing herself back, and folding her arms in manly fashion.

"No one has ever yet made spectacles for those born blind," she rejoined.

"Miss Arabella," said Mr. Erle, "attends the auction-rooms of everybody's mind, brings away for new some worn-out idea—a stool minus a leg, perhaps—and having thus crammed her own narrow parlor, urges the invitation of the spider to the fly. And, in good sooth, you ne'er come out again."

"Then don't let her trap you, Miss Goodfellow, for we are coming in to you this moment," besought Fadette, and moved from the window.

"Cards? Certainly I can find them," said Mrs. Rutledge, when her husband, with another whist-table in demand, came to her as she stood for a moment in the doorway: "but stay, Hugh—look there, did you ever see anything like that?"

Mr. Rutledge followed her gesture to the bow-window, where near Miss Arabella sat Fadette, in converse with Mr. Thorne. Ruthven Erle, in passing, had stopped and rested

his arm on the back of Fadette's sofa, and she turned from the one to the other with arch smile and merry words, apparently not without their sting of sarcasm, for Erle's color rose slightly even as he laughed.

"As arrant a little flirt as ever made a plaything of a heart," Mr. Rutledge said, looking on with an almost smile of satisfaction.

"Since you judge so," she rejoined rather sharply, "what do you think she purposes to do with those two? Fling them aside for a later toy?"

Mr. Rutledge wheeled round, whistling low.

"What, nepotism in a nineteenth century *materfamilias*! Rely upon it, my Janet, our fairy is very far from giving a thought to ends, or ways either. She smiles because she is gay, not because she has white teeth and a dimple. She jibes because her gayety will out, not because it will out in laughter-moving words. At all events, you need not fear for Erle. He sees what he is about, and will never suffer himself to be hoodwinked. She has not the faintest suspicion of his feeling—if indeed it have existence out of your imagination, which oftentimes I doubt. Watch him now, he has piqued her into reverting to young Thorne, and himself saunters off with the most perfect nonchalance to Miss Vaughan."

"He is no fool, that is one consolation," she returned, mollified.

"And she no fool-catcher. I read a lecture in your eyes: deliver it, and you open hers to her game. She were no girl if she laid no snare, then."

"Truth does people good, Hugh."

"Sometimes. But it would not be at the bottom of the well if intended for every-day consumption. Not so palatable as the upper current brimming over for passers-by. Causes wry faces, unless very much adulterated."

She smiled. "You once said you married me for it."

"Aye—

" 'Keek into the draw-well, Janet, Janet,
And ye'll see your bonny sell,
My jo, Janet.' "

"Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Won't this one plantation belle entirely fill Beauregard's requisition for bell-metal? To a dead certainty it would silence the enemy's batteries. If they did not cave in, they are made of stern stuff indeed. In pity, let us have a change of tune. Will you not sing?"

This was Mr. Thorne's aside to Fadette, during a hiatus in Miss Grahame's conversation.

Fadette slightly shook her head, drawing down the corners of her mouth until they became expressive of the most despairing despair. But as, at that moment, Mr. Rutledge pityingly drew near, inviting the belle to a hand at euchre, Fadette rose at Mr. Thorne's renewed request, and took her place at the piano.

"Choose for me, Mr. Thorne," she said.

"That is difficult. I have one pre-eminent favorite as to air, but the words are barbarous."

"And that is—?" she questioned.

"The Virginia Rosebud."

She paused a little.

"Ah," she said, with slightly heightened color, "I see our tastes are similar. The words are as you say. But a friend wrote others for me, which, not remarkable in themselves, render the air available. If they are lugubrious, you deserve that for having so nearly forced me into *mal à propos* laughter. But there should be a national hymn to this. Is it not glorious in its full-toned variety?"

And she began:

November winds through darksome pines are sweeping,
That stand up sternly o'er the mountains bleak—

November clouds in sullen gusts are weeping—
 The dying year wails out her lone death-shriek :
 The stars no longer watch above are keeping,
 But watch-fires flicker in yon glen below :
 'Neath Heaven's tent our weary boys are sleeping,
 While some keep vigil in the drifting snow.
 Glad thoughts, sad thoughts, they come and flee away
 Around those fires, ere dawns the battle-day.
 Far voices of loved ones are whispering near ;
 Soft eyes, soft eyes are smiling, through the night—through the
 chilly midnight drear.
 Dreams—dreams—dreams—on the blast ;
 Hopes—hopes—hopes—flitting fast.
 All brightly Glory's visions throng,
 And Freedom's shout resoundeth strong
 Above the deepening tempest-shocks,
 In lingering echoes of the rocks :
 To arms !—To arms !—To arms for Liberty !

All hushed in camp—except, as time is wearing,
 Is given the challenge low, or countersign :
 Anon, where redly are the fires flaring,
 The guard, relieved, is marching in a line.
 The snow-drifts whitely in the glen are lying—
 Yon lurid pine-tree flames athwart the sky :
 To-morrow, ere the twilight faint is dying,
 Shall silent corpses there so ghastly lie.
 Red flames, red gore, shall flood that valley white,
 Around those fires, ere falls the battle-night.
 Low moans of the wounded shall wail on the air—
 Quick gasps, quick gasps and deathly—broken words—broken
 words of death-taught prayer.
 Death—death—death—on the blast ;
 Souls—souls—souls—flitting fast.
 Yet Freedom, though in tears she stands,
 Still stretches forth unfettered hands,
 And clear alarum sounds on high,
 For freemen, on to do or die !—
 To arms !—To arms !—To arms for Liberty !

"Where did your cousin learn that song, Amy?" was asked, as the clear, mellow tones died away.

"The tune is an old negro melody, the 'Virginia Rosebud.' The words are her own."

"Her own?—seriously, Amy?"

"Seriously. Is it possible that you, with your keen sight and your horror of the *bas bleu*, should never once have caught a glimpse of it, beneath the modishly long robe? I shall tell her."

"No, you will not. Is this all she has perpetrated?"

"Fie, Ruthven! What would you give for a peep into her portfolio? Nay, you would have to steal it, or enforce it as I did. A novel—"

"Entitled, The Lonely Heart, or The Sorrows of a Young Governess," Mr. Erle teasingly suggested.

"Nonsense. There are bemoanings, certainly, but the young governess is replaced by a Scottish waif in Switzerland. You know they are not untrodden ways to her, those that wind beside the mountain lakes. The hero—"

"Aye, the hero—what is his style?"

Erle was thinking of Heine's assertion: "When they write, they have always one eye on the paper and another on a man; and this is true of all authoresses, except the Countess Hahn Hahn, who has only one eye."

Therefore, as Fadette indubitably possessed two, and those of the brightest, Amy's answer was disconcerting:

"His style? Well—like the generality—perhaps her guardian—nearly his age, I should suppose. But stay, where are you going? Remember, all this is a secret inviolable. I had no right to tell even you."

Moodily he was standing apart in the doorway, half an hour later, when Fadette, whom he had scarcely ceased to watch, passed by. And as no vestige of the *bas bleu* was

to be descried, he asked her to walk with him upon the gallery.

She took his arm as they fell in behind the few already promenading there. For a moment neither spoke, until he broke the silence with a remark upon the beauty of the night.

The stars, so large and full, so steadily luminous in the clear Southern atmosphere, threw a dozen gleaming bridges half across the lake. One, far out-shining all the others, so spanned the waters with redly golden beams, that her thoughts wandered across it to waves she had seen glinting thus before—to other oaks which fringed their distant shore—to red-gold lights from vessels passing there. Thence transit was rapid to her guardian.

“Do they see the stars in prison, Mr. Erle?” she asked.

He smiled, replying—

“Rather an indefinite question. Sometimes, if ‘they’ seek them through the bars. I could.”

“You? Were you ever in prison?”

His assent came slowly and hesitatingly.

“When? Where?” was the eager inquiry.

“‘Since yestreen, captive to thy conquering eyes,’” he promptly quoted.

She drooped the “conquering eyes,” vexed.

“Pshaw! how provoking you are! I never can tell what you mean.”

“Devoutly thankful,” was the mental rejoinder. And he added, aloud—

“Nor I what you mean. Do you wish to establish a courier line of meteors between yourself and some prisoner?”

She did not reply, only saying, after a pause—

“Look at that tiny star-spark. Could you be content with such insignificance among so many greater?”

"Such is my fate, however."

She turned, for there was unwonted earnestness in his tone.

"I do not think so, Mr. Erle. There is nothing little about you," she answered, warmly.

"Granted, for myself," he mocked; "but my sphere?"

"Why should you not rise as high as any there?" And she raised her hand toward the glittering heavens.

"To have one day inscribed above me, 'As he rose like a rocket, he fell like the stick.'"

"Ah, Mr. Erle, the rocket only seems to rise to the stars. The stars shine on forever, though clouds or distance hide them."

"But, fair my Astrologer, are not your ideas of grandeur somewhat vague? What is ambition? How may one rise in your horizon?"

"I know my thoughts are crude," she returned, blushing; "therefore I give my faith in another's words." And she repeated, hesitatingly:

"Whoso in life's task hath taken
Glory for a worthy goal,
Hath for a light dream forsaken
True magnificence of soul.

Think it then nor shame nor pity
That no crowds applaud thy name:
Strive on—save the leaguered city,
Though another reap the fame.

So thy people reap the harvest,
Little recks who cast the seed:
Guerdon high as thou deservest
Dwells in thine own holy deed."

"You are right," he said, earnestly; "a man may not now make pause to listen for applause or for censure. If the

cries and groans from the beleaguered city—if the watchword “*ingemisco*” wailed in midnight from her walls—if the cloud which shrouds her, rent by flames that scale the very heavens for redress—fill not his hearing, shut not out all other goal than her salvation—then is his ambition the poor rocket flaring up the skies, which, fallen, the press shall trample back into the dust. ‘Strive on—save the leaguered city.’ But remember, when the city shall be free, and Ruthven Erle’s mark hacked by an unknown sword upon her broken chains—remember to-night, and think not strange if one come to you for yet another interpretation of the guerdon,” he added, sinking his voice very low. “Or”—and at the word, voice and manner changed to careless badinage—“should I follow in the wake of the reapers, gleaning here an ear and there a grain of the harvest I have neither reaped nor sown, is there no hope that those bright eyes may overlook some earth-stain gathered where those gleanings have by the reapers been cast aside and trodden under foot? The gleaners in this world are more in number than the reapers, and their rejoicings noisier over the spoils.”

“Now I see,” she returned, good-humoredly, “you have been laughing all this while. However, to my comfort be it remembered, I have not advanced one original idea; and if laugh you must, it shall be at the philosophy of an authority able to endure it. But a truce to ambition. Beauty instead. Did you ever see any one so heavenly beautiful as Miss Vaughan to-night?”

“Heavenly—yes. A very bird of paradise. But some—of the earth, earthy—might prefer the little earth-loving partridge to this

“‘Creature *far* too bright and good
For human nature’s daily food.’”

"That is because," Fadette returned, "the one soars far beyond reach, while the other flatters the vanity of man by forever calling on 'Bob White, Bob White!'"

"What boots it to spend life in laying traps for that which never stoops low enough to be snared?"

"Mr. Erle, you do not say that sincerely. The motto of your sex is, 'She is a woman, therefore may be won.' And besiegers are vigilant in detecting weakness in the walls of defence."

"Nay; but," he responded, "weakness is woman's forte, within which she is safe."

"A better pun than safeguard," she made answer. "In life, as in our game of chess last evening, when one can no longer queen it, half the game is lost."

"And do you reck nothing of the knight?" he asked.

"All, all, so long as he defends his queen."

"May I ask a very impertinent question?"

"Provided you do not stipulate for an answer."

"The queen has two knights, of course. I claim to be one. Has she chosen the other?"

The words were light, but the tone thrilled her as she listened. She looked up quickly—to cast her eyes down as rapidly, before the searching of his. But at that instant Matoaca's low musical melancholy laugh was borne from the further end of the gallery. Fadette's face changed, and something of scorn curled her lip, as she replied:

"You must ask her. I cannot tell."

"I ask her now. Have you chosen the other?"

"Oh, I? Of course."

"And his name? Is it Thorne? Sandford? Randolph? Has your guardian—"

She laughed merrily.

"Do you expect me to tell you that?" she interrupted.

"It is but fair. How am I to cope in deeds of valor

with an unknown rival? At least, tell me it is not your guardian!"

Were it not simply impossible, in view of Matoaca and that fragment of conversation overheard on the night of the ball, Fadette would have pronounced his tone even painfully anxious in that last sentence. As it was, she waxed wroth against his trifling. She said carelessly—

"One day, perhaps, I may reveal, on oath of secrecy."

"One day won't do," he returned, in her own manner. "Remember, your knight goes forth to-morrow."

"The very thing," she cried; "I'll write a farewell letter of instructions for the campaign."

He looked at her, but there was not the slightest expression of mocking in the uplifted eyes, nor around the mouth, so unusually tranquil.

"A letter of instructions," he returned, an air of indifference covering his chagrin; "on that *couleur de rose* paper you keep—for sentimental purposes—still in your desk, notwithstanding my remonstrances?"

"But see, Mr. Erle, while I have been making this rash promise, we are quite deserted out here. Is it very late? Every one seems to be saying good-night."

A moment more, and she was waiting on the stairs for Charley, who lingered on the lower step speaking to Ruthven Erle. And as she waited, Harry Thorne left the group at the door, and advanced toward her.

She saw, and cast an impatient glance down upon Charley and Ruthven. No sign there responsive to her haste. He leaned with folded arms upon the balustrade, and listened smilingly to Charley; and Fadette, in desperation, determined to throw herself into the conversation, for Harry Thorne now stood beneath the balustrade her hand was tapping restlessly. A pause of irresolution would have plunged her into a *tête-à-tête* with him. She caught a fur-

tive glimpse of his uplifted flushed and eager face. Another instant, and words which he had spoken while she sat at the piano—words which she had affected to misunderstand—would have been repeated here. She gazed, all-engrossed, down upon the two controversialists, and, “going it blind,” as Charley might have said, she cried—

“Quite right, Miss Goodfellow. And what does Mr. Erle say to that?”

Charley turned, astonished and somewhat annoyed, for she had thought her words inaudible except to Mr. Erle, and those words were of Fadette. But she smiled good-humoredly, perceiving that Fadette, although evidently embarrassed, was not displeased.

But Ruthven Erle, initiated by his observation of her at the piano, comprehended at once. And when Charley referred Fadette to him for an answer to her question, he said, regarding her with an amused expression—

“What does Mr. Erle say? That you have stumbled in breathless haste into an impenetrably dark *cul-de-sac*. How do you propose to emerge?”

Blushes and dimples deepened with her low reply:

“Can you not give me a clue out?”

“Aha, Miss Charley,” he said gayly, “eaves-droppers never hear unmingled praises, do they? Yet since no storm of indignation whelms us, our compliments must have atoned. What think you, Thorne? Miss Charley affirms that a certain young lady, although a bright ‘inquire within’ may be read in her eyes, yet keeps her heart fast barred with ‘no admittance!’”

Harry Thorne’s color heightened. He glanced up at Fadette eagerly, and said, in a tone for her alone:

“The door was shut: I looked between
Its iron bars—

“I, peering through, said: Give me then
But one small twig from shrub or tree,
And bid my home remember me
Until I come to it again.’”

By no movement did she betray that she had heard him. She said carelessly, still turned to Mr. Erle; as if in answer to him:

“And not only barred, Mr. Erle, but it is written that—

“‘The spirit was silent, but he took
Mortar and stone to build a wall:
He left no loop-hole great or small,
Through which my straining—’

“or, more properly, through which my passing eyes might look.”

“Yet,” said Charley merrily, “when the soldiers are marching by, they think the last bar should be withdrawn, every spirit at the gate, and joining in the chorus”—and she hummed:

“‘If you belong to Gideon’s band,
If you belong to Gideon’s band,
Here’s my heart, and here’s my hand,
If you belong to Gideon’s band,
Fighting for your home.’”

Harry Thorne did not hear. He was speaking to Fadette.

“Is that my answer?” he asked sadly.

But she could not have understood. She was all attention to Mr. Erle.

He began again, importunately--

“Don’t leave me so! You know I start at daylight for the army. Give me a reply, if only yes or no!”

And still there came no sign.

“Good-night, gentlemen,” now said Charley; “and if

you cannot altogether forget bars, dream of those golden ones which are able to force open many gates."

"Yes or no?" said Harry, desperately, as Fadette shook hands and turned to go.

"Yes and no!" cried Charley. "Upon earth! you don't mean to doubt the weight of bars of promotion?"

"Yes or no?" groaned Thorne again, with one last effort.

But Fadette had gained the landing.

"Yes and no! Yes and no!" cried Charley in supreme disdain. "The stupid fellow! Is that his yea-and-nay good-bye, when he is going off to-morrow? I've no patience! Yet they say he is brave; but that, I reckon, is because 'he never did know his head from a broken tin-pan.' Shucks!" she exclaimed, after a pause, "perhaps, after all, he was saying, 'Yes, *I* know.'"

"Aye," Fadette made answer, ruefully; "I am sure he does know now."





CHAPTER XIV.

CONCERNING BATTER-CAKES.

"Sic itur ad astra."

YES. As you were saying, my dear young lady," stout old Mr. Derby next morning at the breakfast-table remarked to Fadette, between whom and the fried oysters he had been dividing his attentions with scrupulous exactitude—"as you were saying, 'Chicora'—I believe it is 'Beauregard' now—is in dire need of a mistress. All very well for a young fellow of twenty-one or two to go roving about the country, here, there, and everywhere; but when a man is verging on to thirty or so, he needs a home and a young wife—the younger the better—the younger the better." And the old gentleman—closing meanwhile with the oyster, on which, elevated upon his fork, he had at every sentence bestowed regards wistful enough to melt any heart but an oyster's—turned for illustration toward his own young wife. Inauspicious moment! she, at the opposite side of the table, was tossing her sunny curls, and showering her sunniest smiles upon Ruthven Erle.

Fadette was conscious of having said something quite different in substance from the apparent quotation. But she was also conscious that Mr. Erle had suddenly ceased his conversation with his neighbor, and could scarcely be so absorbed as to have heard nothing of Mr. Derby's words. She therefore blushed crimson as she ventured furtively to lift her eyes to note the impression produced upon him.

He had obviously not heard, was not bestowing his at-

tention on her indeed, but on the juvenile assistant-waiter, who, with a plate of smoking batter-cakes, stood at his side, unmoved by a thrice reiterated, "No, Tom; no batter-cakes."

"Confound you, are you deaf?" his master said at length, half angrily, and for the first time turned full upon him.

It was at this instant that Fadette sent the inquiring look across the table.

"Her', her', Mars' Ruthven." The boy, nothing discomfited, again advanced his waiter. And not this time in vain, for there peeped from beneath it a folded corner of pink paper. The boy's careful hands would desert neither end of his weightier charge, and the batter-cakes had hidden the note.

As Ruthven Erle took careless possession, his glance encountered Fadette's. She was still blushing from Mr. Derby's words, and her color deepened yet more when she met that glance. Casual at first, it changed to a gaze of inquiry and surprise, seeking the interpretation of her evident confusion. At once, as her eyes fell upon the note, a new idea seemed to flash upon him. And with a slight compression of the lip, which might have been a smile, he quietly transferred the *couleur de rose* billet to— Well, in these prosaic days even love-letters are deposited in pockets.

Fadette retired hastily behind her coffee-cup—to laugh—to smother that laughter by mouthfuls of the scalding liquid which effectually brought tears to her lashes and blushes still to her cheeks—and to conjecture. That Ruthven Erle assumed the dainty missive to be her own promised letter of instructions, moved thereto by her embarrassment, was clear. And equally clear that she was innocent of it. But by whom and wherefore sent, were points less lucid far. Could Amy—could Uncle Rutledge—any one—have overheard last night's conversation, and made it the

subject of a practical joke? And Tom's mysterious manner—had he been instructed in that?

Resolved on discovering the hidden enemy, she marked searchingly the faces round the table. One swift survey convinced her that no one save herself had witnessed the note-presentation scene. Mr. Rutledge had pushed aside his cup, and resting his arm on the table, was engaged in a lively skirmish with Charley Goodfellow. Amy listened with a faint, absent smile, to the discourse of her neighbor. And of the serenely dignified matron presiding so gracefully over the coffee-urn, one could, of course, entertain no suspicion.

When all rose from the table, Fadette lingered. And as Tom and she were now for a moment left sole denizens of the breakfast parlor, she summoned him from the *buffet*, to which he was removing the silver.

"Tom," she asked, "who gave you that note?"

"Ma'am—note—" he repeated, unmeaningly, twisting the corner of his apron in perplexity, and staring with wide-open round blank eyes.

"Come, come, Tom—a whole shining gold dollar if you'll remember," Fadette said, with an impatient tap of her foot.

Whether or not the promised dollar imparted a ray of its own brightness to the young African's head, he suddenly seemed to brighten, saying—

"Oh, ya'p'm—I knows. Note I fotch Mars' Ruthven, I 'spects. Uncle Jake guv it me. Waitin' in Mammy house for answer."

"And who is Uncle Jake?"

"One o' Judge Brown's black people. He Mistis done heerd Mars' Ruthven gwine acrost de river, an' sont de note, so Uncle Jake he say, 'bout her old man what over dar in de army. Y' ain't gwine to forgit de dollar, is you now?"

he added, pulling his forelock with a most insinuating display of the ivories.

"No, indeed, Tom, not I. It shall be forthcoming this very day. Now, if only he have not opened the note! Spirit of Fun forefend!" And she hastened from the room.

That merry curl of the lip had to be smoothed out into becoming gravity, ere, lingering at the door of the library, she could trust herself to open and enter.

There he stood, leaning upon the mantel, listening with politely repressed impatience to little Mrs. Derby's lively sallies of nonsense, as she smiled up from her low ottoman, coquettishly shaking those curls at him. If "beauty draws us with a single hair," how many an unfortunate must have been entangled by those bright meshes! And how many more is she bent upon entangling? Who can number the hairs of a head?

"Mr. Erle."

The fingers restlessly yet noiselessly tapping the marble of the mantel, stayed; the right hand dropped slowly from its careless closing above that pocketed note, as he turned to meet the voice.

What a demure rose-bud mouth that was, speaking his name so softly. The upturned glance was simplicity itself, and the fairy hands were folded together so tranquilly. Yet how had they learned that unwonted quiescence? He, looking down, knew that it boded ill.

"Mr. Erle, the boy is waiting for an answer," the demure mouth said again.

"What boy? what answer?" he asked, completely mystified.

"Mrs. Brown's servant. You received her note this morning, did you not?" And Fadette could not repress the mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

His met them fully and searchingly. Then he delib-

erately drew forth the rose-colored note, unfolded, and read it. •

“I thank you,” he said, quietly regarding her; “I will write my answer.”

He was gone. And, after all, the Spirit of Fun seemed to have kept aloof from the matter altogether. Fadette sank down disconcerted in the deep-cushioned seat of the bow-window. Was he angry? and going away in an hour! Perhaps he would not even say good-bye! Well, what difference? And she raised her head defiantly.

Going away in an hour. It had passed as she sat there still, the rounded chin resting in the soft palm—the hot blood burning cheek and brow. She sat there still, tapping with restless foot the crushed roses, down upon which swept those curtains veiling her. Still, thinking distinctly of nothing, with the consciousness of a fast beating heart and a choking sensation in the throat, and a vague wondering whether, after all, he would not seek her; whether—no, she would never advance one inch.

A quick, firm step re-entering the library, and a voice she knew, exchanging kindly farewells. A silence following. And then—

No, he was not gone. The curtains were thrust aside, and he stood between them.

She rose, as she yielded her hand to his firm grasp. Her down-dropt lashes quivered, and there was a deep flush on her cheek. But the curtains threw a crimson glow there, and Ruthven Erle had learned to distrust blushes.

“Mrs. Brown’s note,” he said, extending toward her a folded paper, “seemed to require yet another answer. Shall I request you to take charge of this?”

She raised her eyes in timid inquiry, then as suddenly dropped them. And this time—yes, she certainly did blush.

His color, too, heightened, as he looked down upon her thus, and his grasp of the fluttering hands tightened. But he dropped them and suppressed a heavy sigh, as he left her abruptly.

He paused long on the gallery. Fadette could hear his lowered tones in earnest speech with some soft woman-voice, too low for recognition.

His arm thrown across Captain Sandford's shoulder, he walked leisurely to the gate, where old Washington waited, proudly stroking, as he restrained, the restive mettled chestnut. There, it being a Saturday holiday, quite a knot of servants were assembled to say good-bye. Fadette watched the courtesying and bowing, redoubled when he shook hands—not empty-handed, it might seem.

As he sprang into the saddle, he removed his hat, waving it toward the house. How noble and gallant! she thought, while he galloped by, lowering his proud head beneath the rose-vine trailing from the barren oak beside the gate. Swiftly brushed by, petals white as snow-flakes showered on the gray uniform and the black sombrero with its waving plume. And with another bound, that plume had waved its last among the clustering boughs of "Beau-regard."

Fadette waited in the window, pressing her burning brow against the cool pane. And while she watched, Matoca, also watching, with face averted from her, passed slowly by on the gallery.

Unceremoniously, Fadette escaped to her room with the note she felt to be hers. She bent long over the paper which she drew from the unsealed envelope, before she crumpled it up and tossed it into her desk. Then she rose and walked the floor with an air half of anger, half of mortification, yet laughing in spite of herself, as she exclaimed:

"So! He did not care after all! Not quite so safe to

play with edge-tools with him, as with Lionel or Harry Thorne, whom a smile disarms. The joke is rather against me, I fancy."

The crumpled paper was a pen-and-ink caricature of that scene at the breakfast-table. Fadette's shoulders were toward the beholder, so that a full view might be taken of Ruthven Erle himself opposite. A preternaturally diminutive young Cuffee, grinning significantly, nudged him with a salver of exaggerated batter-cakes and wondrously small note, upon which one of Ruthven's hands had closed with eager clutch. The other hand, uplifted, pointed toward a yawning gap in the ceiling, on which his eyes were fixed with a well-portrayed stare of delight, while his smiling mouth framed the words, "*Sic itur ad astra.*"





CHAPTER XV.

WILLOW LAKE.

"A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists—"

ELAINE.

THE sun is already sinking behind the dense level of woodland which belts the horizon upon either hand, as Fadette and her ancient sable equerry ride on beside the cypresses skirting Willow Lake. The waters lie sombre in their moss-darkened shadow, but the heavens brighten moment by moment, richer in crimson and gold an hour later than at sunset-tide. And the east floats cloud-canopies as gorgeous as ever the chosen west prepares for the reception of the day-god. The rushing wings and the twittering of homeward-bound birds, die away in distance. From hidden banks of boggy bayous begins the long-reverberating chant of the "swamp angels;" while from every budding tree and shrub rise insect choruses more or less sonorous. The breeze rustles faintly over deserted stubble-fields plentiful in crops of bushy cockle-burrs. Through silvery plumes of sedge, uprise the rosy glowing boughs of red-bud; and below, wild chamomile and daisies, and purple and white-fringed clusters, float on the billowy sea of russet-brown and yellowed weeds and grasses, just beginning here and there to shine a brighter green in the light of spring. Here the ever-green canes raise their light shafts high among the trees, from loftiest boughs of which wild grape-vines fling down

tendrils, and the trumpet-flower waves in scarlet glory. Stealing subtly through the misty gathering forest-damps, ascends the faint odorous breath of forest solitudes. Afar from the pasture resound the tinklings of bells, the lowing of kine at the milking, the echoing call of the stock-minder. Yet despite these home-sounds there pervades a stillness through the gloaming, but intensified by such reminiscences of busy day.

It irks Fadette, who would defy sadness. But her jaded horse, the best of whose days are far spent, refuses to take the hint of whip and bridle, and plods on for the remaining half-mile.

Then the shades deepen, the waters darken. Silence sinks into stiller slumber within the charmed circle of Sleepy Hollow. The aspen-leaved cotton-wood shivers and tosses as in troubled dreams, and flings faint moonlit smiles upon its double, sleeping on the grass. The oaks gloom against the cottage-walls, but lights shine cheerily forth when Fadette rides up to the gallery.

Late into the night sat the two girls in Mataoca's chamber. Fadette lounged half buried in the soft cushions of a "lesser Sleepy Hollow," while she loosed the glossy purple-black braids of her hair, removing "Confederate times" hair-pins, home-manufactured from Béauregard's bristling thorn-trees, and gayly ornamented with sealing-wax heads.

The two girls were now friends of a year's standing. Much of that space had lapsed in profound quiet, its only events an occasional letter, usually months old, from Ruthven Erle or Mr. Weir, and a paper of as ancient date, given by some wounded soldier travelling from beyond the Mississippi toward his home, and considered a full recompense for hospitality extended. The all-powerful bond of a com-

mon cause pulled down all barriers of social distinctions, and every veteran was an eagerly-welcomed guest.

With the last six months had come a change. Even before the fall of Vicksburg, these long-quiet shores had been harassed by frequent raids. But the worst was not yet. These once so wealthy lands were to be made a wilderness by passing troops, and by the marine fleet, whose god was Mercury, and who, like true thermometers, ascended and descended with the state of the temperature—made sometimes hot by Confederate batteries. Later, peaceful mansions were shelled in retaliation of Confederate guns, a mile or more above; flags of truce ignored, for the purpose of wrapping a village in flames; hospital-flags used in steaming past Confederate batteries; from “unarmed transports” soldiers amused themselves by firing on old men, and even women, standing on their own thresholds. The foe could not quite, however, claim the land for his own. Vain was Admiral Porter’s manifesto, left by the gunboats at divers landings, threatening that—

“Persons taken in the act of firing on unarmed vessels from the land, will be treated as highwaymen and assassins, and no quarter will be shown them.

“Persons *strongly suspected* of firing on unarmed vessels, will not receive the usual treatment of prisoners of war, but will be kept in close confinement. If this savage and barbarous Confederate custom cannot be put a stop to, we will try what virtue there is in hanging.”

Vain—for Confederates still dashed in to the river—bravadoed gunboats to strike the blanket target they themselves held up on the levee—made raids on the captured islands and cut-offs, carrying war into Africa there with such a vengeance, that three or four of their number were known to bring to grief the hundred American citizens of African descent located as armed and belligerent wood-

choppers—and defied those American citizens' white brothers-in-arms, riding before them, sometimes five to fifty, forcing the fifty to halt, "change base," and make *détours*, at the good pleasure of the five.

A great change had in the last weeks befallen Beauregard. Mr. Rutledge occupied a prison-cell in St. Louis.

In the hope of procuring a few mules, sole rescuers from imminent famine, he had crossed the Mississippi, and was returning, when, as he neared the shore, a transport steamed down upon his skiff. The soldiers on board hailed, but in one instant, before Mr. Rutledge could stay his oarsman, who was stone-deaf, a volley of musketry intervened, and the old man fell back, dead. Mr. Rutledge was removed, a prisoner, after his captors had rifled the body. Harry Thorne, who, just as all was over, had ridden out upon the bank, on a wild-goose chase after "Uncle Sam's web-feet," borrowed a citizen's coat, and went daringly on board, as if drawn by curiosity. He found the clerk a Missouri townsman and secret "copperhead," and depositing his all of money for the prisoner's use, received a promise of intelligence concerning his fate.

"Put out the light, Matoaca," Fadette suggested; "see, even your nonpareil mould-candle but neutralizes the moon."

Matoaca obeyed, seating herself at the window beside her friend.

"I confess I am delighted Miss Arabella is away," Fadette began, after a long silence; "I would have you all to myself for my last visit to Sleepy Hollow. Yes"—as Matoaca raised her head hastily—"Aunt Janet is strongly urged to remove, with all able-bodied servants, to Little Rock. Mr. Leigh, and other neighbors, who have proven themselves such in the full sense of the word, offer to watch over the few negroes who might remain behind, and with

whom would be mules sufficient to raise their own crops. That last raid thinned our ploughs to starvation. Of course there will be little or no corn to buy, while so many plantations are deserted, and none worked as of old. The servants will be provided for—hired out, as Mr. Erle's already are, at the salt-works. And as our gold and silver mine at Beauregard has never yet been dug up, we can provide for ourselves when once beyond reach of raids. Aunt Janet is so apathetic, that she is quite likely to assent to any arrangement friends may make for her. So different," she added, sighing, "from her old self, that it is difficult to recognize in her the motive power which was wont to guide all Beauregard, and, through her loving influence, my uncle. True, she leaves no duty unaccomplished; superintends loom, and spinning-wheel, and dairy, and has even taken upon her to visit the field twice daily, as we have no overseer; and if we should remain, it is a question of corn-crop or starvation. But she goes through all as by mechanism. Since through Mr. Thorne we have been confirmed in our fear that my uncle is in that St. Louis prison for no short stay, day by day she has grown more like death in life. I am frightened when I look into her still set face, and I think any change may be for the better—nothing can be worse. Then, too, Harry Thorne urges the move, and Aunt Janet will be guided implicitly by him. It is beautiful to see his devotion, and to him alone she almost softens. She gave him a faint smile yesterday, which would have gone to your very heart."

"Yesterday? Is he in the county again?"

"But just arrived, on a week's leave. What if we should go out under his escort? Oh, Matoaca, why have I learned you and loved you in this year?"

Matoaca only turned away her head. Her lips formed no words. But in the pallid moonbeams, those firm-set

curves were all eloquent. As Fadette observed, a year vanished away, and again she was seated, withdrawn from the gay confusion of the dance, in a window opening out upon a gallery where two were passing by in earnest conversation. She saw again that mournful pallor, the drooping of the proud dark eyes, the mouth fixed in resolute sorrowful endurance. And she heard in those steady tones—

“What is past, is past. The far and near. I let all go.”

She rose up abruptly and moved away, staying before the mirror where the moonlight broadened in a silver flood, and combing out the dishevelled masses of wavy hair which fell, a dark veil, over her gleaming dimpled shoulders. She hummed, as she lost her small hands in the heavy tresses, in a reckless defiance of thought, that was her own. When suddenly Matoaca drew back from the window, out of which her gaze had wandered absently.

“Quick, come here,” she said, with a hurried gesture; “look, child, over there toward the woods. No—no, not that way—here, across that field along the lake. Do you see—”

Shadowed by budding forest-trees, the road shines white through the lawn’s broad freshening verdure, where at intervals, darker than the other checkered shadows, the solid gloom of a group of cedars sweeps to the ground. The water-willows fringing the lake-shore stand apart in front, to give place to the moonlit gleam of waters asleep among the broad-leaved quivering water-lilies, where mists shift and hover and drift across like vague fair dreams. Below, through that gray oak-grove in the bend, a red light glimmers from the solitary quarter-cabin remaining after the last raid. Above the homestead, sere, level, unfenced, uncultivated fields stretch broadly from the lake to the level

wooded horizon. And between those fields and the waters winds the road on to the dark forest, where—

“O Matoaca, can that be the gleam of bayonets?”

Matoaca stood up.

“I—do not think they can be our soldiers,” she said, slowly. “Go you, quietly, and awake Mrs. Grahame, while I call my uncle.”

Swiftly but calmly she left the room, as Fadette sprang forward and opened Mrs. Grahame’s door.

In a moment, the household was assembled. They paused, debating in the open hall, where the moonlight streamed with weird flickering shadows of the cottonwood soughing through every lingering dry gray leaf against the front gallery. Tranquil and clear and deeply blue were the night-heavens, where stars in the southern atmosphere shone down with a full calm glory, soft and steady as the moonlight. Here on the sofa, beside the dining-room door, lay Matoaca’s book, open where she had that morning thrown it down. Opposite, above the door of the parlor, hung Mr. Grahame’s shot-gun; and on the table near by, Matoaca’s work-basket, with the bundle of bleached palmetto-strips and the half-finished hat, told of her deft industrious fingers. Two hours ago all had been thus peaceful; and now—

They looked into each others’ white still faces, and their hearts stood still within them. Fearfully present was every scene—and those scenes were not few—of which they had heard of midnight terrors. As the fold hopes from the wolf, so hoped they from those midnight marauders, whose steady tramp among the dry rustling grasses, upon the fallen wintry leaves, their straining hearing brought each instant near and nearer, until the startled senses almost felt the rude grasp on the shoulder, the heavy, hard, relentless, murderous breath, the paralyzed hopelessness where-

with in evil dreams Fate chains us fast. Fadette shook off that deadening despair, clenching her slight hands in the effort at self-control, until the blazing diamonds, now so valueless, bruised deep the tender flesh. But Mrs. Grahame still drooped, gazing vacantly upon her clinging children, who, thus roused from slumber, were hushed and awestruck in the moonlight and the quiet, and in the presence of those awed faces.

It was but an instant they awaited thus. Mr. Grahame had grasped his gun, and now, in his quick, excitable manner, stepped forward in front of the group; but Matoaca, calm as death, laid a light touch on his arm.

"That must be at the last extremity, dear uncle. 'He that rinneth awaie,' you know. You said this morning you had not half a dozen loads."

"My pistol—" began Fadette.

"And even if we had arms enough and to spare, they could smoke us out of this old house in ten minutes. No; we must take refuge in the woods. Quick!" She spoke to Mrs. Grahame, who still stood white and motionless, but looked up with a piteous gaze in those loving hazel eyes, when Matoaca lifted one of the plump twins into her own strong arms. "Nay, dear," Matoaca said, soothingly, "I will but keep our darling for you. You cannot care for three. Go with her," she added to Fadette, around whose shoulders now clung another little one; "lead her, she does not hear what I say. Fly! But be cautious until you are across the lawn; avoid the moonlight. Make for the willow thicket by the lake. Go."

"And you?"

"My uncle and I follow. Too many must not be together. Besides, we must make some semblance of securing the house, to gain time. Quick!"

Fadette pressed the child to her, and passed her arm round Mrs. Grahame.

"Come," she whispered; "your children follow me."

Blindly, led by that one word grasping her mother-instinct, the poor, dazed woman obeyed the guiding arm. One instant, and, keeping within the shadow of the trees, they had gained a dense clump of cedars, the branches of which swept the ground, impenetrably dark. In this temporary security they crouched, for voices and the tread of armed men now drew nearer.

The infant slept, hushed upon the mother's breast. The little girl clung to the mother's hand, too awed to question or complain, though night-dews fell damp upon her one light garment. Fadette wrapped her own shawl over the shivering shoulders. So cold—and yet how colder far the grave! How frail the barrier, those cedar boughs!—barring back what fate?

What fate? She shuddered and clenched her hands together, for a sharp report, and a wild shriek from the house, rang out on the heavy midnight air in answer to her question.

Matoaca?—The old man?—She parted the branches where she knelt. And as she knelt, before she dared to lift her eyes, she gasped out in choked utterance, lower than the moaning through those branches, one word in which is all prayer, one wild cry on the God of Hosts. She looked. No one near. Yonder, far across the lawn, before the house, a knot of men gathered round some object on the grass. Now, with the glitter of the moonlight on his bayonet, one stoops, examining it. Another kicks it brutally aside with a shouted curse. And all move on to the house, where the crashing of doors soon tells their errand, and the detention that comes too late—too late.

Although the moonbeams rest upon it, she cannot discern its form. The trees cast wavering shadows there, and distance confuses the outline. She can bear this no longer. The shrubbery is thick and overgrown. The moon passes under a cloud; it is black and broad, as she glances up to see. Now is her time.

She stoops, and lays a touch on Mrs. Grahame's shoulder. As the ghastly face is raised to hers, she whispers hurriedly, "Stay here, dear, until I return. Do not move; do not let Lily move. Fear not, you are safe here, quite safe. In one moment I will be back. No, no, Lily," and she gently looses the child's hold of her dress. "Birdie will give you a mighty lump of white sugar—yes, two of them, one for each hand—if you only stay here by mamma's side, quite still, like a wee mouse."

She marvelled how she could speak thus calmly, while every pulse so throbbed.

Swift as the wind, and as unseen, she fled from bush to bush, from tree to tree. There it lay at her feet.

She dared not look at first, but bowed her head against the huge gnarled trunk behind which she stood concealed. Then she leaned forward tremblingly.

Ghastly white as the moonbeam on his brow—rigid as the outline of that gaunt cottonwood beside him on the grass—still as the dead leaves beneath him—lay Mr. Grahame. And on those leaves there trickled and fell, drop by drop, a pool of blood.

Was this death?

The wide-open light gray eyes, once so keen and restless, stared dully up into the cloudless midnight skies, and only seemed to flicker from that stare when the scant gray foliage of the tree above stirred and shifted and rattled harshly. The fixed white lips moved no more with their wonted quick decisiveness. The wrinkled hands had lost

that hurried nervousness of hold, and stiffened, clutching tight across the moveless breast the useless shot-gun, flashing in the moonlight.

The strange rigidity appalled Fadette. She shook in every limb. And moaning, Is this death? the terror of it grasped her very heart-strings.

But she dared not leave him thus. She must know whether all help were helpless now. She was moving forward shrinkingly; when a loud shout and the rush of feet drove her back, crouching, into her concealment.

She peered forth. It was toward the cedar covert that the trampling tread was bent. And thence, thence flitted a white-robed form, pressing an infant to her bosom, grasping a child's hand in hers. Had she been discovered in that hiding-place? Or had she, urged by restless dread and a sense of insecurity, ventured forth to seek another, yet more distant? Fadette never knew.

On, through the shadows, in and out among those fringing water-willows, like mists which floated there, on fled the white-robed figure and the child. Fast and faster, darkness closing in behind, pursued the black fiends. And there a white officer, his drawn sword flashing in the light, shouted and urged them on.

More, Fadette could not see, although she forgot prudence, and stood up, pushing aside the foliage. Once her fingers clenched upon her pistol, and she started forward. But even in the impulse, she felt with a crushing helplessness how vain must any aid of hers now be.

And still she heard, listening there with sinking heart, that onward flight.

A low far-sounding plunge—the splash and gurgle of waters—a volley of musketry—the shrill cry of a child—a louder, wilder wail—

And all was still.

In the gray dawn of the morrow, among the broad-leaved odorous monaca-lilies, there floated up and down, at the will of the chilly wind and the restless ever-moaning waves, the listless form of a child, white and soft, and swaying to and fro with the wind-swept mists which hovered there. The listless form of a child, limp and flexile as the lily-stems round which the golden tresses tangled, washed out of curl in the cold waters, and flung back from a cruel wound, a deeply-cutting blow in the temple, whence the tide of life had ebbed.

Not until gray-shrouding evening shades had fallen was the mother found—the infant folded to her bosom as if in slumber, until in Paradise it shall awaken thus.

Heaven alone saw—Heaven alone recorded—the horror of that night.

At first Fadette had sunk down, overpowered. Then, as deepening silence told that all was over, fear gave strength once more. She knew they must return this way—she knew the insecurity of her concealment—and she resolved to fly. One moment she stayed, bending over the old man, to lay a hurried touch upon his heart. It seemed to her that it had ceased to beat. But as she removed her hand, a blood-stain crimsoned the palm. Had it freshly trickled from that bullet-wound in his side, or was it that with which his life had flowed out? She had no time to ascertain, no time for anything save to bind up the wound hastily with her handkerchief.

And then she fled. He must needs have been swift who would have overtaken her; but she fled unseen. Crouching in shadow, flying in light, on she sped, until in the dense canebrake, far up the road down which that band had come, she sank down, breathless.

In the stillness, in the darkness, only broken into by a

flickering shimmer through the cane and the moss-palled boughs above, the full reality pressed yet more heavily upon her. Never before had Death drawn near to her, and in more than his own terrors had he come that night. She shrank back from the swaying of the canes against her dress—from the dropping of the withered leaves, one by one, upon her clenching hands—from the flutter of the night air in the long loose-floating hair. Every gust of wind through the troubled cottonwoods came freighted with that childish scream, that heart-wrung wail. And though she clasped her fingers tightly on her burning eyes, she could not shut out the flying white-robed woman—the shape stretched out all rigid on the dead wet autumn leaves.

A thousand insects still hummed on, as if life were one unbroken harmony. A katydid in the cypress above waxed argumentative with one in yonder hollow oak. Afar was taken up the burden, now deeper, and now shriller, of the frogs. And the mocking-bird, whose nest was in the great magnolia on the lawn, was pouring forth his softest melody. A mockery, indeed!

Now and then a louder echo roused the forest—the crash and fall of deadened and decaying timber—the spring of a startled deer. Yet to Fadette each leaf-fall was portentous.

At last a nearer sound. The cane rustled and clashed at a hurried approach. Quick-drawn breathing became audible—so near, that she could almost feel it stir her hair, as she crouched there, her head upon her knees. She dared not look up. All her strength was gone at last. She could not have moved, even had there been hope in flight.

The rustling ceased abruptly. A stifled "Thank God!" was all that Fadette heard. It was Matoaca who flung herself upon the earth beside her—in Matoaca's arms that

she sank, as came, and trees, and moonbeams whirled madly before her.

When she revived from that death-like swoon, Matoaca was bending over her. She raised herself on her arm, and gazed around bewildered. Then sinking back, and closing her eyes again, she moaned—

“It is all true, then—no dream!”

The silence which ensued was broken by a deep-drawn breath.

“The child moans in her sleep,” spoke Matoaca’s hoarse voice. “Is she motherless, that you are here alone?”

“Yes.”

“And Lily?”

“She too.”

Another long, deep silence.

Then Fadette ventured—

“How did you come here? Where—”

Matoaca misunderstood, and filled her pause with enforced calmness.

“Where is my uncle? Murdered. The brave old man! They had discovered our hiding-place. One seized me by the arm. I wrenched away, and fled with the child, leaving my shawl only in his grasp. The old man had hurled him back, and now standing unshaken in their midst, kept his hand upon his gun, and spoke to them. I could not hear his words, but I saw the angry flash of their bayonets. I heard the quick report of a pistol, and he fell heavily to the earth. I saw no more. They had lost trace of me. How I came here, I know not. I know nothing after.”

“It was then you who shrieked when they fired?”

“I do not remember.”

No word more was spoken. The two sat holding by each other in the dark.

"Hark! they are going away," Fadette whispered presently.

And they heard the trampling of the horses' hoofs, passing near—so near!

The child stirred in Matoaca's arms. "Mamma! mamma!" it murmured, nestling its plump hand on her neck.

And Matoaca, glancing down by the wavering light of the moonbeams, saw that it put up its full red lip to cry. One scream, and it would all be over with them!

"Yes, yes, darling," she whispered, tossing the child up. "Ah, there's Birdie! see Birdie! Birdie sing May-blossom pretty song, so she shall." Then catching the dimpled, naked feet, she set herself diligently to "shoe the horse and shoe the mare," until there was danger lest the child should laugh aloud in its glee.

But the trampling died away in distance. She touched Fadette's arm.

"Come," she said.

"Where? O Matoaca, I dare not!"

"You must. I cannot leave you, and I must know if he is past all hope indeed."





CHAPTER XVI.

SWAMP-ANGELS' REST.

Are vows alone at chancel-rall
Made sacred, as they're fair?
Shall one heart flower in the ray
That leaveth one to waste away?
* * * * *
Ah, sweet, the scale wouldst balance free?—
Love's wing beats in too heavily—

NOW quietly was twilight falling! The illimitable forest stretched out far and wide, hazy with up-rising mist and down-trailing moss. Aisle after aisle of forest arches opened up. For that unbroken flooring of water threw out each slender shaft or massive column clear and far against the sleeping silver. Down into that silver swept the silver-gray moss, and the soft tint subdued all—the lofty ashen trees, whereon February, going out as a lion, had these two weeks stayed the budding foliage—the weird, out-clutching, heavy dark-brown vines—the fine green tendrils showering verdure on those giant trunks. Soft as yonder slanting sunset ray, the lingering scarlet berries glowed through moss-festoons upon that bush. And wand-like boughs of red-bud bending low over the boundless waters, found themselves reflected far in yonder archway with a lengthened ray. Thus, where the sun sank in full blaze of golden glory behind those aisles on aisles, flushed the sun-glow broadening in the west, and

stealing thence with the fainting breeze across the ripples. Low-murmuring, these greeted its coming, and while the branches stirred and rustled in the stillness, that flood of ruddy gold crept half-way up the trunks.

Crept half-way up the trunks, and half-way up an alien object in these flooded forest solitudes. In the broadest aisle of all—where, when roads were, there might have been a road—stood, midway immersed, a huge high-swung old-fashioned family coach, without driver, without horses, without sign of ownership or occupancy. Until now, from the lowered window a young girl gazed anxiously forward, where were closing in the shades of evening.

The shadows lengthened on that weary waste of waters. The darkness drew near and nearer, until it seemed to press upon her. No human sound in all the stillness. Only that spectral rustling, and the mournful lapping of the ripple through the trailing boughs. No moving creature. Yet that was surely—no, nothing but a distant stump, across which the breeze, breathing its last through the tangled moss upon that shrub, had for an instant flung a wavering light. But hark! a heavy splashing through the water far behind. All silent still in front, whither she has been looking eagerly. But from the rear, that rushing sound echoed again and again, ever louder and more loud from wooded wall to dome.

A breathless terror seized upon the girl. She strove to cry aloud, but, as when we cry in dreams, her voice had lost its power, and died away in gasps. She glanced out upon the water's dangerous depth, and sank back, cowering, into her corner, covering her face, crouching there, awaiting fate. Nearer and nearer it came—with a tread as of horses' hoofs.

“Hallo! What the deuce can this mean?”

From behind, there came another answering halloo, and

the rushing noise repeated. But Fadette—trembling, cowardly Fadette—had started up, reaching forth from the window two little eager hands. She scarcely needed the waning light to define the broad-shouldered figure that should accompany those tones.

“Mr. Erle! O Mr. Erle!”

In an instant he had reined in his horse, and was at her side, grasping her extended hands.

“What is it? What has happened, that you are here alone?” he asked anxiously, observing how they trembled in his own, and as he observed it, tightening his hold upon them protectingly.

What a lovely light quivered over the blushing face, as it leaned out toward him! How the tears glimmered in the dark, deep, upraised eyes, and glad smiles flitted and came again around the rosy parting mouth! How trustingly she glanced up to meet that passionate gaze of his—how maidenly she dropped the veiling lashes now!

Yet in an instant more she had withdrawn from his clasp, had summoned back the old, mocking smile, and was gayly replying to his question:

“Nothing in the world has happened, but that you have deprived me of an anticipated display of heroism. I looked to meet nothing less than a jayhawker, a Yankee, a panther, or the ancient ghost of some bandit wanderer of Maçon’s band, returning to the old hunting-grounds. You have come upon us in an exodus, Mr. Erle. We are on our way to Little Rock, were bogged down so that old Wash had to cut the mules loose from the carriage, and our escort, Mr. Thorne, having discovered, further on, the top of Mount Ararat, has conveyed thither one by one, upon his own steed, in the double-pillion fashion, minus the pillion, Aunt Janet, Amy, Matoaca—You have heard of the Sleepy Hollow—”

She stopped short, paling to the very lips with the recollection of that fearful night. It did not dwell upon her memory daily, for persistently she fled from it. But at a careless word, a sudden sound, the very least alarm, it came in all its overwhelming horror. And the removal from Beauregard, once deplored, she had afterward urged and longed for.

"I have heard," Ruthven Erle said, gravely. "Miss Vaughan, then, remains with my aunt?"

"And the child—all that is left to her to love," sighed Fadette.

"No, there is one, whom if she would—"

He paused. For now approached the splashing through the perturbed waters, and he turned to present—

"Mr. Weir."

"Mr. Weir!" Fadette re-echoed the name with a glad cry of surprise. Flushed with pleasure for Amy's sake, she started up.

But tears rushed to her eyes, when, instead of the stalwart young soldier she had one evening seen, a worn emaciated figure met her view. And to her cordial greeting, he slowly extended the left hand. The right sleeve was looped empty across his breast.

An expression of pain passed across the haggard countenance observing her. And she hastened to pour forth incoherent exclamations of Amy's joy—with lashes downcast, lest he should read her pity. Ruthven Erle came to her assistance.

"Hark!" he said, "there is a movement ahead—Thorne coming this way probably. Just ride on, Weir—Amy will not forgive us even these moments—and turn him back with you. If you still persist in desiring to be incognito at first, give yourself another name. You can remain in the background as you please. Say that I am

in charge of this carriage. Shall it not be so?" he added, to Fadette.

She assented, and Mr. Weir rode slowly on.

"Poor fellow! he dreads Amy's first glance," Mr. Erle said sadly, looking after until he had disappeared among the distant shadows. "But you have not told me how you happen to be left here alone. Thorne does not deserve to be trusted—"

"Stay," she interrupted his half-angry speech; "don't pronounce judgment in such headlong haste. It was not Mr. Thorne, but a combination of courage and cowardice on my own part. Amy and I were the last occupants of this Noah's Ark, and when Mr. Thorne returned for us, I insisted upon Amy's going with him, volunteering to follow on a mule which Uncle Washington should lead. But after Amy was fairly off, so great waxed my terror of my long-eared friend's knowing way of twitching up his ears and switching his shaven tail, that I sent Washington on to recall Mr. Thorne, when he should have deposited Amy in safety. Mr. Thorne must have heard your halloo, for Uncle Wash is a slow mover, and would hardly have reached him. But may I, on my part, inquire into your mysterious appearance?"

"Amy's letter actually reaching me in a week after Mr. Rutledge's capture—your unprotected state upon the river—my desire to remove you into safer vicinage—the sequence is easy to an application for transfer. Norman Weir, incapacitated for service in the field, will obtain a clerkship at Little Rock, and I join the Missouri cavalry, Thorne's regiment. We arrived at Beauregard this morning, learned your movements, and pushed on with all speed, doubting nothing of overtaking a carriage, on our gallant chargers."

"Oh, such a journey, Mr. Erle! The bayous we have

swum, the bogs we have stalled in, the ocean we have stemmed—making five long miles from dawning's first light! To twilight's last shade, I must add, if you do not speedily perform your duty as knight-errant of forlorn damsels."

He lifted her to her place behind him, and curbing strongly his impatient horse, on they plunged and floundered through flood and mire, she now and then crying out, and involuntarily catching his arm as water deepened, or mud afforded footing yet more treacherous.

"And now," said Ruthven Erle, over his shoulder, when at last they went on more evenly, "have you nothing to ask concerning one Ruthven Erle, since Amy says all, save one fragment, of his last six months' letters to 'Beauregard' miscarried? Did you never feel curiosity, not to say the shadow of interest, for his fate?"

The word "letters" brought associations which militated against his earnestness.

"Aye," she said, smiling slightly, "both curiosity and interest were rampant, until not very long ago Matoaca received an epistle which apparently contained no food for either, but from the advent of which we concluded you yet among

'The glorious band
Who battle for their native land.'

"I wrote," he began, but ended abruptly there.

"I know you did," Fadette replied mischievously; "and really my curiosity was in so starving a condition, that had the recipient been other than Matoaca, with her grand ideas of honor, and her rigid justice, I should have committed petty larceny, and stolen a perusal—just as I was strongly tempted with that billet you intrusted to me for Mrs. Brown. By the way, she sent me a most singular note in

return, evidently thinking either you or I quizzing her. What could you have written?"

He looked at her fixedly, but she met him with a glance so innocently unconcerned, that he, uncertain whether to doubt or to believe, merely returned carelessly—

"Mrs. Brown or I must be strangely obtuse. And while on this subject, I have in my saddle-bags a letter from your friend, Captain Randolph, whom I met of late in Richmond."

Splashing and plunging at this moment, floundered the horse through treacherous bog, and through water saddle-skirts deep. But though her horsemanship was tested severely, Fadette this time made no movement to cling for safety to Ruthven's arm. Only when the danger was past, and the horse once more stepped cautiously on, she asked, in a tone which she vainly strove to render perfectly matter-of-course :

"What did he say? I have heard nothing for months."

"What did he say? Much of letters written, letters unanswered. Less of valorous deeds in battle, than report says for him. Most of a little sister-playmate. Something of his brother's possible release from Lafayette."

"Oh, Mr. Erle! Do you think he will really be released?"

Another plunge of the horse, and a hand laid softly on his arm.

He turned abruptly, and looked at her. He thought :

"Can it be possible? Is it not the guardian, then, but the playmate?"

He replied :

"Your friend had strong hopes. He said there was no testimony against his brother, and that friends were endeavoring to procure his freedom. Said that he would not take the oath, and that the underground railway might

probably bring him among us sooner or later. But all this may require time."

"I am so glad! so glad!"

For one instant he did not speak. Then he responded in a deep low voice:

"You can never thank God for it so truly as I."

"You?"

She could only stare in amazement. There was no answer to inquiring eyes in the broad shoulders presented to their view. She strove to steal a glance at the reverently-bowed face, but at the risk of her equilibrium could gain no more than that extreme wave of the flowing fair moustache. Coming to the determination never again to ride behind Ruthven Erle, of all people, she reiterated:

"You? I really do not see—"

"The camp-fire light? Yonder to the left, through those tall canes. See the white smoke curling up against the moss-grown trees, and the broad far-reddening glow across the water. And hark! Thorne's halloo to guide us."

As the canebrake opened in a narrow straight green avenue, appeared a ridge, or, in truth, a tiny oval island, large enough, and only large enough, to meet all desires as a camping-ground. Dim between surrounding cane, upon which already were feeding the unharnessed mules, gleamed water upon every side. White-tented wagons were ranged in a line at the remote "Land's End," and on either hand burned the large camp-fires of the negroes, who, in groups of men, women, and children, basked in the glow at supper. Snatches of wild choruses echoed sonorously with the ring of the wood-choppers' axes, as the young trees tottered and fell beneath their strokes. Thence, with a carpeting of mosses, ferns, and dwarf cane scantily covering the rich black earth, an open space stretched away to the near

point of the island. There rose a noble forest group, the slender polished leaves of the water-oak flashing out among light budding hackberry and gum, and the red-oak's heavy moss-draped boughs, in the flickering flames of a mighty camp-fire. Those flames flickered also redly on the two long white-covered wagons drawn up just beyond as sleeping-apartments. But brightest of all they glowed where, around the blazing logs, upon a brilliant flooring of scarlet and blue saddle-blankets, was gathered the party in quest of which Fadette and Ruthven Erle rode on.

"A name for our desert island!" cried Fadette, when, later in the evening, the travellers were all assembled round the camp-fire. "Not name it? What exploring expedition ever had a better right? It is no island, you say? Then all the more probably no one has discovered it before us. For certainly there never was a flood like this since the Great Deluge, when these wilds were uninhabited."

"That is no *cela va sans dire*," Matoaca smiled. "The Indians contend they were the first of creation, on this continent too, and have their own tradition of the Deluge. Yes, these wilds were wrapped in utter darkness days on days, and at the last a far white light was seen aloft, still rolling on, until it broke, a huge wave which engulfed the world."

"Ah, then, we must have an Indian name," said Amy.

"What prettier than Chicora?" Harry Thorne demanded, with an admiring glance toward the owner of that sobriquet.

"Nothing prettier, indeed," she returned, laughingly; "but many things more appropriate. Not a mocking-bird to be heard this evening, whereas all these gutturals from brake and bayou might assuredly suggest Swamp Angel."

"Swamp Angels' Rest? So be it," pronounced Ruthven, throwing himself beside her; "for here ends our croaking over perils in the way."

"And do you know the legend of the Swamp Angels? Unquestionably, just here it had its origin."

"And do *you* know, Matoaca," cried Fadette, "what every one incurs who only names the name of legend in my presence?"

Her friend smiled.

"A dire penalty, no doubt. But perhaps the Arabian proverb might apply—"Curses, like young chickens, still come home to roost."

Fadette returned a reckless shake of the head. And while Harry Thorne seconded her, Amy started, for in stentorian tones a bullfrog close at hand demanded, she declared, a recital so nearly touching himself and family.

"Only, no 'bullfrog dressed in soldier's clothes,'" stipulated Mr. Erle.

"No, no—an Indian tradition. In virtue of the drop of red-man's blood in my own veins, you must have perfect faith that I render it aright.

"Once upon a time—so long ago, indeed, as a time, times, and the beginning of times—the remnant of an ancient warlike tribe had journeyed far to this primeval wood. Hither they were fled from their ancestral hunting-grounds—the boundless prairies which the white man now claims for himself as Texas, the soil of which his foot at that day never trod. But other enemies had swept them forth, and driven them here to the dense forest, where the earth no longer trembled at the thunderous trampling of the buffalo, and but the deer invited to the chase. A race more numerous had raised the warwhoop against them, and the bones of many warriors lay bleaching in the sun on those unshadowed meadows, where the prairie wolves had left

them bare. And, too, the Spirit of the Fire had surged down in a sulphurous cloud upon their village, with his bow of flame bent over it, and there struck down or wrapped in his embrace full many a fugitive, so that of all their braves and mighty men but one remained. The fragment of the tribe was spiritless and cowardly—a very race of ‘old women.’

“But Tah-we-que-nah, the young chief and mighty medicine-man, still led them on. His fearless heart was touched with compassion for the trembling and degenerate creatures of the warrior band his fathers had led forth to battle. For he trusted that their conduct was the spell of some magician among their enemies, which in due course of time his own great power would dispel.

“And so, although his own soul burned for nobler game for his unerring arrows than the timid deer, and fringe upon his leggings worthier of a brave than that of buckskin—still, he lingered here from summer until spring-tide, with the shadow of his tribe.

“On none of those young men whose brows yet bore the traces of the war-paint, and who yet at evening sang the deeds of former braves, while in the wigwam idly lay the tomahawk and scalping-knife—on none of those did all the maiden’s eyes turn as on the gallant chief. But among all whose long dark hair was loosened from its braid, and whose deer-skin tunic was wrought and decked with beads to catch his observation, it was only on the lovely Wee-ne-on-ka that he looked. And every glance so pleased the Bending Willow, that she was to be his bride upon the morrow.

“The sun went down as brightly as it did this evening—not on a boundless waste of waters, but a vast rich grassy level spread beneath the budding foliage and the evergreen cane. And there, just where you sit,” she added, turning

to Fadette, "stood Tah-we-que-nah and his Wee-ne-on-ka—save that that willow against which you, Mr. Erle, are leaning, was not there. Her head bowed down upon his arm, which drew her close, they murmured love's vows, until it seemed the very trees might learn the oft-repeated whisper.

"So they parted.

"On the morn that was to be the wedding-day, the sun which rose at last from boding banks of cloud, was greeted with a wailing shriek. By what strange freak, or magic of a still pursuing foe, the mighty Mississippi had overflowed its shores and swept across the intervening miles, all in one night, remains a mystery—but so it was. Water, water, creeping in on every side—water gurgling through the trailing moss, and lapping through the cane, and moaning with a sullen threatening about the cypress knees and gnarled old vines which writhed and coiled like water-snakes. Still, water flaring with a vast relentless eye, which peered around each knotted trunk, and glittered through each green-leafed shadow.

"A frantic panic seized the miserable tribe, who, inland-bred, were ignorant that it was the habit of the great Father of Waters to pay this annual visit to his children, the bayous and the sloughs.

"Calm among the cowards who were madly running to and fro, stood Tah-we-que-nah. He came forth from his wigwam, his medicine-bag across his shoulder, and he called on the young men, who, overawed by his commanding tones, a moment ceased their cries and lamentations.

"'Why do you fear, my children? The Great Spirit cannot hear you when terror drags your voices down to earth. Rejoice, and look upon the flood—it is a sign he still remembers you. See how it closes round you here, and soon will leave no resting-place. My young men and warriors, the Great Spirit does not will that you should lurk here in

these solitudes, where rust your tomahawks. He would have you on, to wash them bright again in your foes' blood! Listen, my young men, and let your heart grow strong. Last night this Great Medicine sent your chief a dream. He and you were journeying westward—westward—where the mighty buffalo is waiting for your arrows on your fathers' hunting-grounds. On, warriors—the Great Spirit wills it!

"But not one moved at his command. Only Wee-ne-on-ka drew a footstep nearer, bending in her weeping, till her long black hair swept down upon the ground.

"'Wee-ne-on-ka, you at least will come,' he said, and stretched his hand out toward her.

"'Wee-ne-on-ka, rest with me,' a young man whispered who had vainly sought her for his bride, 'and we will climb yon tallest oak, and wait together far above the waters, till they ebb away. And surely that is wiser far than roving westward, where the Evil Spirit lies in wait for us.'

"So Wee-ne-on-ka turned in fear from Tah-we-que-nah.

"Tah-we-que-nah's midnight eyes flashed like the lightning. Yet once more he spoke:

"'Will no one of my brothers follow me?'

"Half the tribe, in idiocy of dread, had set themselves to burrowing in the ridge, already dank with seapiage, in the frenzied fancy to conceal themselves from the approaches of the foe. Swayed by his voice, they took a step now toward him, but the glitter of the water drove them back. And thus they hesitated, silent, moving to or fro with every word from him, or every gurgle of the ripples.

"But a din of voices answered—from the canebrake, where some sought to hide from the subtle enemy, and from the trees, which others climbed in haste.

"'But the waves are surely gleaming westward! They

will soon go round, go round, go round!' groaned deeply forth one chorus.

" 'We cannot follow. If we move, we must step in, step in, step in!' in a higher, sharper key of great disgust, a second made reply.

" 'No, no, we'll not descend. Down there it must already be knee deep! knee deep! knee deep!' shrilled forth a third from their position in the trees.

"Tah-we-que-nah cast a slow and scornful glance on all, and then he flung the mystic pouch down heavily at Wee-ne-on-ka's foot.

"He turned, vouchsafing not one backward glance, and throwing himself upon his jet-black steed, he dashed into the flood, his front set firmly westward.

"The splash of those departing hoofs smote on the hearers' hearts. Wee-ne-on-ka shivered, and leaned forward hesitatingly, her arms outstretched. The burrowers advanced one uncertain step—instantly, however, amended by two backward. The timid croakers one and all opened their mouths wide, to shout the chief a final warning.

"But that instant, through the branches, came the last glimpse of the night-black horse, and of the young brave's nodding crest of scarlet eagle plumes, which flamed across the waves. With that last glimpse Wee-ne-on-ka shivered again, and the first ripple laved her feet.

"She would have sprung back in her terror, but she had lost all power of motion. She stood rooted to the spot. She felt strange throbbings through her every limb, and swayed and quailed at every gust of wind. The lovely Wee-ne-on-ka was indeed become a bending willow, always leaning towards the west, and sighing mournfully with every breath. She turned one parting human glance in supplication to the lately favored lover. He no longer held her hand. A bright green tree-frog leaped up in the

boughs, and all the croaking mouths were gaping, all the woods rang out with chiming choruses. Hark! you may hear them even now—the deep, gruff bass, ‘Go round! go round! go round!’—the jeeringly ironical ‘Step in! step in! step in!’—the shrill ‘Knee deep! knee deep! knee deep!’ of the tree-frogs.

“The tribe has spread to the four quarters of the globe, waxed mighty in its ignominy. Its burrowing crawfish band has wandered far, and taught to many a man its gait. Many centuries later, however, some of this band, journeying laboriously toward the Choctaw nation, were captured, and the medicine-men restored them to the human form. But when they told the story of the frogs, the great magicians shook their heads. Those croaking noisy cowards should no more be named among the red-men. But stay, Mr. Erle, don’t lean too heavily on Wee-ne-on-ka.”

Ruthven shifted his position.

“She bears too great a weight of wickedness and centuries, eh? And Tah-we-que-nah, what became of him?”

“After the manner of red men and white, went his ways and found another Bending Willow, who bent only to his sway.”

“So Wee-ne-on-ka was the unchanged one after all?” And he looked up into the rustling boughs and repeated:

“‘Beneath your boughs, at fall of dew,
By lover’s lips is softly told
The tale that all the ages through
Has kept the world from growing old.

“‘And still, though April’s buds unfold,
And summer sets the earth a-leaf,
And autumn pranks your robes with gold,
You sway and sigh in graceful grief.’”

All listened to the whisper of the branches through the stillness.

"Mamma," cried little Janet to the pale, unheeding mother, on whose lap she leaned, and who, after the momentary excitement of her nephew's greeting, had relapsed into her usual self-wrapped state—"Mamma, I've known for a coon's age that the frogs keep saying that. But do you know what the owl says too? Now if I tell you, please ma'am, mamma, don't look that a way, so far, far off."

And the child began her story eagerly.

"Mamma, there was once an old no-account uncle—he named Tom—going through the woods one dark, dark night, so dark that he was mightily afraid, and slipped along as easy! When suddenly, right through the cane-brake close beside him, came a rustling, and somebody called out:

"'Who, who, who boy, you?'

"'Mars' Billy's Tom, Sir, going to wife-house,' and he kept on fast as he could clip it, for he had no pass, and wasn't after any good.

"But he hadn't taken two steps, before he heard—

"'Who, who, who boy, you?'

"'Mars' Billy's Tom, Sir, going to wife-house.'

"'Who, who, who boy, you?'

"'Mars' Billy's Tom, Sir, going to wife-house—don't I keep a telling you?' he called back, as cross and as crabbed as old Daddy Rabbit, what had an apple, and a possum come to grab it.

"But crash, crash, crash, went the canes just then. And the way old Uncle Tom just took up his heels, and ran like snow!"

Janet transferred all compliments upon the story to Mammy, who now came to claim her. And Matoaca presently lifted her brow from the golden curls of her namesake, hushed to sleep in her arms. She was impatient

of silence—to people which, dread memories too often thronged.

“One and all lost in meditation,” she said; “one and all gazing intent upon the flames. I have heard you speak of pictures there, Chicora. Now, to break this dull monotony creeping on us all, let each one trace the subject of his thoughts there in some stirring scene.”

“Yon first, Miss Vaughan?”

“My legend has been duly given, Mr. Thorne. Mr. Erle, won’t you begin? The subject of your thoughts? A war sketch?”

If it were, he had sought strange inspiration. For, although from his posture, half reclining, supported on his arm, at Fadette’s feet, he too fronted the camp-fire, yet the eyes, shaded by his hand, rested not there, but unmovedly, thus screened, upon Fadette’s dreamful face. At Matoaca’s appeal, however, he slightly shifted his position, and bending his regards on the heart of the flames, responded immediately.

“Behold,” he said, with a gesture pointing where the fanciful imagery of light and shade flickered over those massy glowing logs, “there they march, the Vandals, sixteen thousand strong. See the flash of their bayonets down yonder hill! Hear the tramp of their horse, charging Forrest’s five hundred! See how we fall back there, reluctantly and slow, contending ever step by step. Now descends that ashen shadow on the field, and shuts in the red glare of battle. And the evening and the morning are the first day. Light again—the morrow, and the foe advances. Yonder, where the grand old forest winds in view of Tunnel Hill, there wind our grander Forrest and his followers. Within that clond of dust sweeps on the enemy’s advancing column, resting for a space upon the brow of the hill, then drifting slowly down. The blue-

coat is cautiously ensconced in every ambush, behind each knoll and tree and building. A shot is fired, and the foe replies, while a dozen of his skirmishers rush across the railway which—behold it—traces itself darkly there. But even as these cross, higher up, unaware of the approach of danger, two who ‘wear the gray’ are coming down the road. Shall these be lost? Forrest sees, and calling to his side a handful of his escort, with a cheer he leads the little squad to the charge upon the enemy between. On they dash, spurring their steeds into a headlong gallop. Every man behind, heedless of his own peril, is watching, all-absorbed. A sudden pause. The fearless six are enveloped in smoke-wreaths—clouds from their own rifles. For the Yankees are falling back—the two Confederates saved. From the hillside the foe fires upon the band, who, their purpose accomplished, turn to retreat—three of the seven, Forrest of the trio, wounded.”

Fadette had listened with flushing cheek and eyes riveted upon the speaker. But now she commented, with an air of mocking indifference :

“You say ‘fearless six,’ and ‘three of the seven wounded.’ I once saw a play where Greek met Greek in tug of war, and the routed army, numbering in the outset twelve, marched back thirteen. Account for the discrepancy, Sir, if you please.”

“No discrepancy, fair Incredulity. May there not be six fearless ones in seven?”

“Ah,” she said, leaning forward as light suddenly broke in upon her. “You were there yourself, then.”

Ruthven Erle was the first to perceive the unwitting innuendo, and led the general laughter, in which Fadette confusedly joined.

“And the end? Is it really true? And were you wounded?” she asked, presently.

"My dear Miss Chicora, do you not know it is quite useless to question the 'reliable gentleman from over the river?' However, the enemy fell back in the direction of Chattanooga, Forrest harassing them on the march. For your last, and, it is to be inferred, least important question, there is still perhaps a slight answer here." And he touched his left arm.

A heavy sigh escaped the pale lips of the stranger, who had this while stood silently leaning against a tree at Amy's side. The shadows of the mossy branches, and the hat pressed over his brows, shaded his countenance from her view, but she glanced up with a quick impulse of sympathy at the dangling sleeve, and tears glittered in the sweet, blue eyes. Then hurriedly she called on Fadette for her story.

Fadette's excuse upon excuse proved unavailing. To her pleading that not even one poor fable would recur upon her summons, Matoaca declared that the question was not of fables, but of pictures and of reveries, which she at least could not disclaim, so absently as she had gazed into the fire.

"But," Fadette added, when, her thoughts thus drawn 'through the clefts of confession,' she had acknowledged them, "my reverie was the memory of a long-ago actual dream, and besides being wild as dreams are, is unsuited to the occasion in subject and in length. What, you will still take no denial? Then on yourselves fall the weight of the nightmare, if so it prove. If any can doze through it—"

"*Requiescat in pace,*" supplied Ruthven Erle—"Now dream your dream."

"There"—she began, seeking again her pictures in the fiery centre which had first suggested them—"there the cataract whirls and thunders' with the avalanche's roar, down from that giddy height, down through that deep-worn

channel in the rock which walls in perpendicularly the mountain river, glooming and darkling far below. A narrow archway spans the chasm to the gray old castle frowning above. In its solitary courtyard, leant against the casement of the banquet-hall, a young girl in the peasant garb of Switzerland is standing in the dark. I see her in my dream—yet not as a mere gazer. Myself seemed entered into her.

“Around, the night falls murkily. The casement rattles wildly in, while the storm drives against it. With low, deep, distant mutterings, the blast is shriving the dying day, in whose last smile the ivy on the tower dashes off fast-gathering tears, clinging with frenzied clutch to sill and buttress. Without the castle-gate crouches the howling hound, and yonder from the northward ledge bodes the owl at solemn intervals. The ramparts shake upon their rocky base, as the lightnings over the far mountains hunt down dreary shades. On yonder steeple-towered cliff the dread *Lammergeier*, whose vast wing flaps broken in the storm, cowers down and stares into the darkness. Down the steep, below the castle, flees the shivering torrent, while here against the battlements, and there in the shut-in glen which they command, the shuddering pines bow down their heads to shun abhorrent sights aloft. Upon their posts the sentinels shrink against the wall, and loose the slackening spear to mutter *Aves*, as *Pilate* shrieks upon his mountain, while the stern wind pauses, listening, and all foul things brush against the very face of heaven on their sin-black wings.

“Yet within the castle all is revelry. The hoary minnesinger tunes his harp to rhymes of love and chivalry. In the embrasured casement, a thought withdrawn from the goodly company, that fair proud lady sits enthroned on the carven chair of oak. While, most like a knight-errant,

returned for the conqueror's crowning at her own white hands, the noble Lord of Arnheim leans above her chair. She smiles up into his darkly handsome face as reverently he touches her hand to his lips—smiles through tears while she listens to his words, for they are all of parting on the morrow. In tournament these three days past he won the hand he holds, yet the proud Count of Geierstein would yet further prove such claim to his only daughter, the fair young Countess Amalia. A year and a day from the coming dawn is Herman of Arnheim to absent himself, and in that interim to win fame worthy of his noble name and of his noble bride.

“She smiles up into his eyes, and they soften with tender homage as he reads her soul's fair page, where only his name in golden characters is written. So innocent a page he is not wont to turn, if rumor speaks truth. For even from his native Suabia it whispers that the house of Arnheim claims a strange wild lineage, deeply learned in forbidden knowledge. Inasmuch as though they were knight-like brave, and though the chase, the tilt, the battle, found them ever to the fore, yet weird tales were told of their Suabian castle—wondrous lights were seen there, mysterious Paynim guests had free access and seats above the salt at the Baron's table, while foot-sore monks in full odor of sanctity were bidden to rest them at the castle gate, and the cup of wine was sent without to them.

“She smiles on still, though the minstrel has tuned his harp to a new accord, and sings now of absence and forgetfulness. Nor does the knight give ear to other than the silent speech of her lovely eyes. Neither the music-wail within, nor the storm-wail without, nor yet that smothered moan close beneath the casement in which he leans. No one heeds that. The lady may care for the little bower-

maiden as for the petted spaniel that cringes at her foot. But when the dainty trinket is bestowed, the glittering collar donned, she knows not, dreams not, of a need beyond. Love—yes, she loves the spaniel and the bower-maiden—she strokes the shining brown coat of the one, the glossy raven tresses of the other—would have one fawn upon her slender foot, the other caress her snowy hand when it so pleases her to put it forth. And have they need of more? Then let the maiden mate her with the gallant young Landsknecht on whom my Lord of Geierstein, in honor of faithful services in tent and field, has bestowed that Senner-hut and pasture down the mountain-side. Those faithful services merit yet another boon, and thus the noble Count and his fair daughter themselves, some weeks since, urged on the fit betrothal. Love—that will come fast enough. Surely she will not dare, the lowly bower-maiden, to lift her head—not dare to meet with level-fronting glance the Lord of Arnheim's eyes! Not dare, although the day he came a stranger to these savage cliffs she had rescued him and his night-black steed Apollyon from imminent peril. For which service, she has been duly recompensed in the bestowal of a dazzling jewelled necklace. And had she but worn that gaud displayed this morning when she crossed his path in the courtyard, he would have remembered her, and given her a kind good-morrow. But, hid beneath the bodice, how sharply the wrought links bruised her heaving bosom as she presses her clenched hands there! Is it that she loves to look upon the bravery of the gentles, that she lingers thus without, never once removing her gaze, though the wind plucks at her gay peasant garb, and rain falls drop by drop from the overhanging ivy down the flushed and burning cheeks, and glitters on lashes moistened with no tear?

"The wind clutches at her garments, the storm lays a cold touch on her shoulder, shaking her slight form. And now another touch is laid there also.

"She utters no cry, but the very ivy bough she holds by trembles not more than she trembles as she turns. For the slender stream of light through the casement discovers to her astonished vision no castle servitor, but a countenance seen dimly through the uncertain haze of far-off childish dreams—a countenance long years forgotten, now flashing back upon her. Again she lay, a wailing child, out in the tempest, close against the barred portals of the castle. There that man's weird shrivelled face, with deep unearthly eyes, had bent one instant over hers, that stared wide open in the lightning glare, and anon, rousing the warden with a thundering summons at the gate, he had vanished, his black robes blending with the midnight.

"He turns on her now that same gaze, piercing to the very depths of her soul. And with a quick movement she folds her arms upon her bosom, pressing the corsage closer, lest in that tumultuous heaving of her heart the jewels should flash out.

"*'Thou poor one,'* he utters, in a tone hardly distinguishable from the sighing in the ivy; *'and is it thou, descended from long line of Persian Magi, that wilt stoop thy neck to lord and lady, and mate thee with a base-born churl? Or hast thou nerve to yield thy will free scope? Wilt dare to look upon the path that lies before thee, up to honors, riches—love? Then follow me.'*

"She rivets her regards upon him, fear giving place to wonder.

"*'My path leads to the Senner-hut,'* she said, bitterly. *'The finest cheeses are my honors, the golden cream my riches. Love—'* Her voice faltered there, and with a shiver she averted her head. In the movement her glance

again fell on the casement. Through the tempest's transient lull she heard, as Arnheim bent there still :

“ ‘Fair, is she? Nay, by my troth, I see not the moon while the sun is smiling on me. Yet I would fain lack in naught of gratitude for the life that now is doubly dear. Is the maiden betrothed, sweet lady? Else, when this weary year and day shall have passed by, thou shalt bring her to our Castle of Arnheim, and there choose her out the bravest of all Arnheim's gallant retainers, whom for her sake—and thine—we will endow richly as befits thy faithful bower-woman and the savior of my life—my guide to this fair castle, wherein I have found more than life.’ ”

“ The maiden stays not for the lady's words, but when her strange companion spoke again, ‘Wilt follow me?’ she moves in silence to his side, and so across the courtyard.

“ Wilder than ever rages the storm, sweeping on in midnight garments that enshroud the two stealing over to the sally-port. Rain and wind patter and trail along the pave, and other footsteps are not heard. The sentinel shudders, and the hound at his feet bays only at the storm. The gates stand open with no grating louder than the blast's wild rattle, as again they close behind the two, who now have crossed the perilous bridge, and wend along the torrent's further brink. This path to honors, riches, love, is fraught with danger, darkness, weariness. Yet she pauses not, nor murmurs. Only one instant's stay she makes. It is where above the foaming torrent, on a green cliff fringed with pines, is perched a Senner-hut. She glances through the open lattice. A stalwart sunny-browed young peasant has thrown himself upon a bench before the fire blazing in the centre of the apartment. He bends forward, burnishing with careful pride the huge two-handed sword which still bears marks of combat. Suddenly he suspends his

whistling of that recklessly defiant Volkslied. Lifting his head as he tosses back the waving lock from his bright blue eyes, he cries, looking on the glittering blade approvingly—

“Soh! my trusty friend! thou and I stand ready, Confederates both, for Leopold and all his Austrians. Out upon thee! shall Arnheim dare more for his gentle lady of Geierstein, than thou for Hermione, the bright wild Alp-rose sheltered in her bower?”

“The maiden without covers her face with a shivering moan, as the blade, waved over his shoulder, flashes in the firelight. Yet when the sapling larch, which leans with her against the lattice, catches at her scarf in the wind, she breaks the branch impetuously off, and hurries on.

“From gorge to gorge, from scarp to scarp—along the very brink of the torrent revealed by blasts which for a single instant cleave the mists down to the black waves, far below. How those blasts mock at her as they whirl up gusts of spray and dash them in her face! How the mists assume threatening forms, and circle giddily round that strange guide! And still she hurries on—”

“What, that is surely not the end?”

“At that moment I awoke, Amy—the perilous path was traversed while I had fallen asleep in the sunshine on Mount Pilatus. My guardian had been reading to our assembled Alpine party the Great Unknown’s storm in those solitudes; the description of Castle Geierstein; the legend of Baron Arnheim and his black-robed Gheber guests, and of the fairy-like Hermione’s mysterious appearance at Arnheim. There by her beauty and her magic lore of forbidden knowledge, she soon won the Baron’s heart and hand, when one day a drop of holy-water falling on the enchanted opal always worn upon her brow, quenched for a time its flame, and forever that of her mortal life. But—Oh, Mr.

Thorne, Mr. Thorne! Confess that you, too, have been dreaming during my long dream."

As an involuntary nod had already given assent, his stammered denial came too late. And no atonement, Fardette in her indignation declared, was possible, save a story far—yes, very far—from long, and which thunders of war should keep from being dreamy.

"No," he returned to her laughing advice to seek his subject in the fire—"I can see there only blazing logs and falling chunks, suggestive of nothing in the world but heat and light. Will you have a bushwhacking adventure, instead of a picture?"

"It was just such an evening as this. The sun was dropping—you must know, upon the prairie, he conducts himself in no such old-fogy style as to rise and set—was dropping like a globe of fire down behind the far level grassy line which blended, crimsoned, with the crimson of the skies. It was the fall of sixty-one. A score of us were lying grouped in bivouac in a fringe of trees upon the prairie. A gay and festive-looking crowd, for though we had been riding, singly, day and night down from our homes in North Missouri, all but two were newly gotten-up recruits. I myself was magnificently arrayed in blue Federal overcoat, and unparalleled cavalry boots. The only ragamuffin in our ranks was a gallant fellow who, with me, had come up from the army on recruiting-service. And here at last we were all met, to find or fight our way together down to our own Price. So, having won through our solitary dangers, and had our through of silence and wariness, we imagined ourselves fairly out of the wood, and were whistling over our progress rather loudly and defiantly. When bang! bang! bang!—along the woodland fringe which we, over-confidently, had left unguarded—blazed away a hundred rifles, and a hundred horsemen

dashed up at a howling pace. You bet that music brought us to our feet in faster time than 'Boots and Saddles.' And never Texan officer, with his 'Prepare to git, boys—git!'—could mount his men in shorter order. No room to crawfish then, Miss Vaughan—we were up and at them—every man resolved to prove on this first field that he belonged to no Mackerel Brigade. And how we did pitch in! Until at last the enemy saw it good for his wholesome to vamoose, with a livelier 'git' than ours, leaving in his tracks some dozen dead or dying. But I was past beholding this conclusion—dropped senseless with a bullet in the breast.

"When my eyes unclosed again, both conflict and pursuit were over. A mound beside me showed where our slain had hastily been laid. Around me, stretched out, rigid, more than one dead foe. And yonder, our boys were mounting, the two or three severely wounded lashed upon their horses, to be carried under cover of the night to friendly shelter. They were leaving me for dead, then! My vaunted Federal equipments had betrayed me!

"With one mighty effort, nothing short of desperation, I raised my head. But the cry died in a gasp.

"At that very instant I felt a sudden wrench at my right boot—the self-same, Erle, which so nearly did for you last winter at 'The Homestead'—and when I gasped out, as I have said, a man sprang up with a halloo!

"'What, not dead yet!' he cried, dropping the boot he had been pulling at. 'Now that is just my trifling luck! For if ever I bark a live man, 'twill be after this! Look here, you sir, Mr. Yank, hurry up, and I'll wait for your boots.'

"This was said with the most thoroughly matter-of-course air imaginable. And the tattered comrade who had ridden with me from the southward army took his seat

leisurely upon a log at a short distance, his elbows on his knees, his chin in the hollow of his hands. He sent one glance after the departing rebels, as if to determine in what time it might be expedient for me to bequeath my boots. And then, in the twilight, from beneath the battered old felt, and between the black elf-locks above and the bushy beard beneath, he dropped his eyes on me, in courteous attendance on my convenience. It was too much ! If that had been my last breath, it must have spent itself in the laugh which I laughed then !”

It was re-echoed now—more merrily, no doubt.

“ But, Mr. Thorne,” cried Amy, “ you must not leave us to suspect that fast friend of your boots. What, then, became—”

“ Boots and all here, Mrs. Weir. Your cousin enjoined brevity. And now your contribution—you see we are all awaiting it.”

“ Your story,” said Amy, “ recalls a certain bush-whacker’s glee I have lately seen. The writer, one would think, must in some way belong to the bush—at all events, sings *con amore*. But of this you shall yourselves judge.”

This was spoken with a sly glance toward Fadette, who, however, looked into the fire, almost too carelessly indifferent.

Amy went on :

“ Up, up, and to horse, boys!—no bugle is sounding—
No drum wakes the forest-born echoes surrounding;
The gray mountains sleep in the moon’s loving smile—
The mocking-bird lullaby chanteth the while—
Is’t for Liberty sleeping?

“ Afar o’er the prairie yon lake lies a-dreaming,
All dim o’er its breast the long grasses are streaming;
O’er their image that star is reflected so clear,
It would seem that in slumber the heavens draw near,
As the earth pales to shadow.

- “ Away to the eastward the prairie, reposing—
The breeze on its bosom low leaneth, half dozing—
Yon mountains shut out the fierce din of the world,
And here o’er the forests the white mists have curled,
As from peace-pipe of nature.
- “ And here, where the boughs stir apart in the gloaming,
Moving drowsily back for dreams going and coming,
They sleep—though the wood-tick is sounding alarms,
And the death-owl forebodeth—they sleep on their arms,
That band of guerrillas.
- “ Afar, the still prairie a measured tread shaketh—
The prairie’s hushed heart ’neath the iron heel quaketh—
All blood-red, Mars glows on the lake as they pass—
The down-trodden flowers amid the tall grass
Bow their heads, weeping after.
- “ Up, up, and to arms, boys !—the foe is upon us ;
Now strike for the name our right arm hath won us :
They come, but they tremble in coming—the hounds !
Our foot on our own soil, the forest surrounds,
And the bush is our home, boys.
- “ Up, up, and to arms ! for the foe is upon us ;
Strike home to the faint hearts whose fear hath undone us :
If they trembled to shake off the tyrant’s base chain,
Before brothers betrayed they shall tremble again,
Base-born sons of Missouri !
- “ Up, up, and to arms, boys ! The sword Vengeance graspeth,
And Liberty’s up, and her bloody hand claspeth :
One blow for the fond eyes that watch and that weep,
One blow for the comrades since yestreen asleep,
And all for Missouri !
- “ Up, up, and to arms, boys ! Like wild beasts they hunt us ;
Teu slaves to one man, thus they dare to confront us :
They bind us—he’s harmless who ’neath their heel lies—
Or they lend him a rope if he struggles to rise—
He may rise e’en to heaven !

“Up, up, and to arms, boys! Remember, remember,
How they drove out our loved ones in snows of December:
Our homesteads on fire glow red with their shame.
O God! that wild shriek from the heart of the flame!—
God! Thine is the vengeance.

“They are up—every man to his saddle-bow springing,
So silent, they fright not the mocking-bird singing;
The steeds paw the ground, all impatient, nor neigh,
For trackless, they’ve learned, is the bushwhacker’s way,
And the echoes will gossip.

“Like the slow-gathering tempest the foe is advancing;
Through the brush like the lightning our rifles are glancing,
Thunder-crash after crash—like the leaves in the blast,
As we sweep down upon him, the foe fleeth fast,
And he falls with the dead leaves.

“Hurrah for the bush, boys!—the bloodhounds are yelping
Back, back to their kennels—one volley more, helping!
Gleams the steel of their carbines through yon mountain pass—
Surge after, the waves of the long prairie grass,
And the dead there are theirs, boys.

“To horse and away! Ten to one we have driven—
The shackles they brought for our wrists we have riven;
Yet back they will march with their thousands amain,
If we seek not old haunts in the mountains again—
For the winter on cometh.

“Soon white through the gray wood the snow shall fall airy;
If we stay, they will track our path o’er the prairie.
A long night in those caves—yet thus rest the free deer—
And woman’s smiles sometimes like moonlight will cheer,
For they love—fair Missouri.

“When the leaves come, adown with the streams we’ll be sweeping;
We’ll waken the land from her long winter sleeping—
Pay off all old scores then, and any new debt:
Retribution may slumber, but cannot forget—
Then hurrah for the hills, boys!”

Ruthven Erle's glance had followed Amy's. He saw Fadette flush beneath the consciousness of it—flush deeper, as he thought, when Amy pronounced, with a little malicious emphasis, "For they love—fair Missouri." He leaned there perfectly indifferent to the fact that his unvarying scrutiny must be observed; watching her face as though an instant's movement must lose it forever; seeking in every fitting expression there, the solution of a doubt grown insupportable at last.

Emotion after emotion surged rapidly as her blushes. Yet she did not think. She only felt dimly that the old footing upon which she and Ruthven Erle had stood, was in some way swept away, leaving the next step in the future unsteady and uncertain—and that he was looking at her as he had never looked before—and that all was strangely uncomfortable and wrong, and yet so strangely happy too, that she sat on motionless, afraid to break the dream.

"And now," said Amy, softly, to the wounded soldier at her side, "will you, too, not conform to our evening's rule, Sir, and give us your story?"

The stranger started and drew back hastily, seeming not to have understood her question. But when she repeated it, troubled by his isolation among the home-group, he stammered out, reluctantly and hesitatingly:

"I—I cannot—"

With the first tone, Amy had sprung to her feet.

"It is—it is his voice!" she cried: "Norman! O Norman!"

"Amy!"

She threw herself upon his breast, speechless.

"Then you do not care, my own?" he asked, after a moment thus, still holding her fast.

"Not care! O Norman, for you! But—anything that brings you to me once again!"

Fadette slept, but toward dawn the freshening chillness roused her, notwithstanding the manifold wrappings provided for such an emergency. She shivered, and drew back the damp wagon-cover, looking enviously toward the three soldiers outstretched in such apparent comfort, wrapped in their blankets, on the further side of the camp-fire. On this side was no one. All continued so quiet, that presently she began to argue the propriety of stealing out unseen, to warm her cramped and benumbed limbs. The longer she looked, the more impossible to resist the temptation. So she descended noiselessly to the ground, and made her way to the fire, the blazing pile between her and the trio of slumberers, toward whom she sent one hurried glance, fearful of observation.

A graceful picture she formed there, with the illuminated foreground, the white wagon as background, and the dark moss-curtained woods framing all on every side, yet disclosing a faint glimmer of water.

She knelt upon one knee, her small cold hands outstretched to the heat,—her hair, from which the white misty nube had fallen to her shoulders, and which had escaped from the confining comb, flowing in purple-black ripples almost to the ground. Some one there was a connoisseur in pictures, seemingly. Ruthven Erle these last five minutes had been standing by, his arms folded and his gaze fastened on her.

Presently, rousing herself from the drowsiness which had crept over, clasping her hands behind her head, and yawning slightly, she looked up, and their eyes met.

She started and colored, moving as if to rise.

"No, do not go," he said, drawing near, and leaning

against the rustling oak which overshadowed her. "I came but to see if your fire was still good. The dawn is approaching, somewhat chilly. Are you chilly too?"

"Chilly?—I—I—no, not now," stammered Fadette, confused, she knew not why. And hastening to fill the pause, she added:

"You soldiers certainly understand the art of building fires. Does the charm of camping-out lie chiefly in its novelty, Mr. Erle? Have I slept well, you ask? Well—in the most delicious way, in dreamful snatchès, with the gurgle of the water through the cane, the trailing of the moss along our tented roof, and the far-off thousand forest sounds. And then to awake, and through convenient tatters of our convass, to meet clear stars shining right friendly down! Ah, Mr. Erle, I don't believe the stars are at all friendly with you, that shrug was so skeptical."

For a moment he made no reply, and then he spoke in a lowered voice, still looking at her:

"Do you remember when last we watched the stars together?"

"And *à propos* of them, waxed so philosophic—yes."

"Philosophic! Not so I. Far other than philosophy's teachings was the lesson I learned that night."

She felt it, as he bent down, speaking with subdued earnestness. And she showed that she felt it, while flush after flush quivered over her downcast face, bowed lower and lower from his view.

"What was it that I learned?" he said, again.

She did not reply, only trembled excitedly, the shadowy lashes sweeping her burning cheek.

His hand closed gently but firmly on hers clasped together.

"Listen," he began, "and tell me if that which I then had by heart, it must indeed be my endless life-task to forget."

But at that instant there was a rustling at the wagon curtains. And as Fadette, without one word or glance, withdrew her hands in haste, Amy's light figure appeared balanced on the wagon's edge, and her voice summoned Ruthven Erle to aid in her descent to warmth and cheer. And although at the sound Norman Weir started up and intercepted the cousin, the recital of the lesson was not destined to be finished on that dawn.





CHAPTER XVII.

LAND-HO !

"My heart, I bid thee answer :
How are Love's marvels wrought ?—
'Two hearts to one pulse heating,
Two spirits to one thought.'

And tell me how Love cometh ?—
'It comes unsought, unsent !'
And tell me how Love goeth ?—
'That was not *Love* that went.' "

FROM THE GERMAN.

LAND-HO !"

Harry Thorne, who had been riding in front of the carriage, splashed back with this exclamation. Night had at last closed in darkly beneath interlaced forest boughs curtained in with moss. The mules were plunging blindly on through mud and flood—the leaders now hung on this tree, now straining violently against that stump, and anon thumping suddenly down into several feet of water, over the remains of a swept-away bridge. Against all these perils the vigilance of careful Washington, and the guiding shouts and wind-tossed torches of the soldier-escort, were powerless to guard. Since morning, when a hastily constructed raft had ferried successive loads of passengers and freight across the swimming water beyond "Swamp Angel's Rest," the "Swamp Angels," true to the name, had never emerged from bog and bayou, but floundered on, now swimming, now bogged down, and anon on the verge of many an upset. After a long day's journey of five miles, crossing at last a shallower slough, they

reached a low ridge, the boundary of the swamp, and the beginning of "the hills." Pines began to mingle at intervals in the growth of black-jacks. A stone or two occasionally elevated itself near scant dwarf cane and taller cockle-burrs. And "the hills" might be seen in a succession of faint slopes, by the aid of as lively an imagination as was requisite to discern the so-called "bottom" in the flooded district just traversed—in which, plunge as they would, to no bottom travellers apparently attained.

"Land-Ho!" And now a narrow clearing in the wood, where starlight was at last observable, and yonder the redder illumination of fire-light in a log-cabin. Desolate in the midst of a cleared field, surrounded by a straggling, ragged worm-fence, the owner yet kept open house there, if one might look to the broad chinks in the walls, through which the fire flickered.

On terra firma, then, our travellers alighted, with much grumbling, however, and protestations that the adjective could only be used in the comparative, as they made slow progress through the clinging red-brown mire of the enclosure. Somewhat to the rear, yet sufficiently in the vicinage of the double cabin of two rooms, with open hall between and gallery in front, two or three negro cabins and out-houses were clustered. A cow rose up slowly, disturbed from muddy bed of repose by the gallery steps; a number of pigs scampered squealing here and there; and quite a troop of small African tatterdemalions gathered staring round, then sped away, summoning "Mistis" to decide upon the wayworn case of the travellers.

Stout homespun "Mistis" proved compassionate, upon Mr. Erle's graphic delineation of "dangers by flood and field." And the self-constituted guests, followed by some half-dozen gaping and grinning barefoot children, white and black, were escorted into the sitting-room, weaving-

room, or sleeping-apartment—claiming the three titles by virtue of bedstead, table, and split-bottomed chairs, and loom and spinning-wheel. The busy hum of the latter ceased as the eldest girl turned from it, dipping-stick in mouth, on the entrance of the strangers.

The puncheon-floor seemed very smooth and restful to the weary ones who had been jolting over flooded corduroy patches, or struggling through bog, during a three days' journey. The prospect presented no hope of accommodations for the night, although the hostess offered to vacate this apartment. But carriage-cushions, and a blanket-spread floor before the deep mud chimney which occupied with huge blazing logs one entire side of the cabin, were the acme of comfort to those who had been cramped within the carriage for so many hours. And in the cheery roar and crackling of the flames, and the glow they threw around on raftered roof and rough-hewn walls, one forgot that the wind whistled through crannies a hand-breadth wide, from which the mud cement had fallen.

Altogether, the party assembled was a merry one. Adventures were recalled, much to the amusement of the audience, great and small, in the background; some slender war-news returned to the interrogations of the hostess, whose husband and sons were in the Cis-Mississippi armies; and a respectfully inquiring old "uncle," who came in to replenish the fire, was informed that these river-people had indeed seen a live Yankee, and that, though sufficiently appalling, he did not possess horns.

Then the ladies must examine the fine piece of homespun now in the loom, and learn how its blue and green and red and yellow plaids were dyed with this or that bark or stone or earth; and admire that great roll of butternut jeans just finished for soldiers' use.

Finally, though the table, upon which were still the re-

mains of supper, afforded evidence that the hospitable entertainer lived upon the *fat* of the land, Matoaca had very graciously to decline the offer of corn-bread, middling, and sweet-potato coffee, while she proposed instead to give the dame a cup of real coffee, that luxury denied by the war, and valued next to snuff.

Fadette went out upon the gallery to summon Washington and provision-basket.

The order was delivered, but she paused, detained by the beauty of the night. True, the full moon, just rising, a great globe of crimson glory, behind the low slightly waved line of woodland, glinted across upon a weary waste of mud, where the flood had not long since encroached; upon deadened timber in the fields around; upon the forest of stunted black-jacks, with their dull-brown harshly-rattling foliage, closing in the near horizon, where only an occasional black pine uplifted itself from the monotony. But beneath the moonlight's magic touch, the gaunt white trunks rose weirdly against dark-blue glittering skies; the woods lay like a murky storm-drift beneath snow-clouds; and even the ragged worm-fences wound along in varied light and shade.

But other cause than moonbeams kept Fadette without.

All day long had Ruthven Erle lingered beside her in wait for a word, a smile, which might separate his attentions from those offered with more manifest anxiety by young Thorne. Yet vainly. In the broad light of day the memories of the dawn waned mistily and dimly, until they were unsubstantial as a dream. But very present, very clear, stood out five moments in the noontide, while Ruthven Erle had checked his horse beside Matoaca Vaughan. Mrs. Rutledge and Amy had lapsed into drowsy silence in their respective corners of the carriage, and Fadette, from her seat in front, might have been presumed to take no

note. But she had seen Erle ride on there, his hand resting on the window-sill close beside Matoaca's, his strong, earnest face upraised to hers, with a tide of troubled emotion sweeping over it, an impassioned pleading, which had thrilled Fadette's pulses, and made her fain to turn abruptly to the blank prospect of moss-palled woods, and waters that caught the long gray shadows, before her. She stared on these with a long fixed stare, that was almost fierce in its intensity, while her breath came in short quick gasps, and her hands clenched tightly on each other. She did not move, thus leaning forward, until Ruthven Erle dashed by without one look, and rode on to the front, where Mr. Thorne and Mr. Weir were both essaying to find a ford across the slough. She had turned sharply from watching him, and in so doing her glance had fallen on Matoaca. The face a moment ago blushing, downcast, and averted, was now thrown back wearily, wan, and pale, and the long black lashes that swept the marble cheek were freighted down with one or two large tears, while that imperial mouth was set with the stern triumph, the worn fagged after-time of conquest—self-conquest? Fadette was pondering, until she forced aside the current of her thoughts.

But that current had swerved again from her control while she tarried alone in the moonlight, her hands lying listlessly upon the rude railing around the gallery, her eyes dropped with unobservant outlook on the dismal sweep of mud and wood.

She was still standing thus, when a well-known step resounded behind.

She started. Her first impulse was to take refuge within-doors from a *tête-à-tête* she feared. But as she saw Ruthven Erle already at her side, she felt avoidance now would be too marked.

"Upon an exploring expedition, Mr. Erle?" she

asked lightly, determining to make the best of her position.

"Here is my bourn," he said. "I was in search of you." And he leaned beside her against the railing, removing his hat and carelessly shaking back that falling wave of fair hair.

"In search of me? Thank you. I should have known those grand arrangements for tea could not dispense with me," she said, hastily attempting to pass him.

He intercepted her with a lazy, almost nonchalant movement.

"Not at all. I am the only one in need of you at this present. Cannot you stay and talk to me for the space of ten minutes, during which I may smoke this cigar—yes, a cigar which has run the blockade, and which I know of old your goodness to encourage?"—lighting one as he spoke, and interrupting his words with an occasional slow enjoyable puff. "Or you shall continue your absorbed contemplation of moon and mud, provided you do not abandon me to it in solitude."

"No, no, rather than that I will send you out the fair aboriginal maiden," laughed Fadette, resuming her place, however, reassured by his manner.

"I have just returned from an interview with her at the stable," he replied. "She had taken possession of my horse early in the action, had ridden him down there, and my whole will was in requisition to prevent her unsaddling and feeding him with her own fair hands."

Fadette smiled.

"Pity all Dulcineas are not thus complaisant," she said.

"Unfortunately, I cannot appropriate the compliment, all was done in so matter-of-course a style. But," and he suddenly shifted his position, looking down into her face, "you say true; it is pity all Dulcineas are not complaisant."

Why are they not? Why do they lend the inimical wind mill, that modern form of Fortune's wheel, so many sighs and breaths and gales of coldness and caprice?"

Her quick glance caught the slight smile curling his lip.

"Because," she replied, "degenerate Quixotes of this day ride on and do battle with the windmills in their own names, or in those of half a dozen Dulcineas."

He removed his cigar, and now, still resting on one arm and searching her face, he said slowly:

"You know it is not thus with me. You know—No, go you shall not," gently but firmly covering her hand with his upon the railing, as she attempted to pass him. "You shall hear me out now. What have I done that you should torture me thus?" he ended, in a strangely altered tone.

She dared not meet his eyes. She trembled violently, and was silent. He went on, his tones softening to tenderness:

"Do you know that the touch of this little hand—which perhaps I hold as mine—mine—thus—to-night for the last time—has thrilled my thoughts, waking or dreaming, the two long years since last it lay in mine? Do you know that an accent, a glance of yours, has returned again and again, instinct with hope or with despair, above the battle-thunder—through the midnight hush—upon the weary march? My darling, have the sweetest been delusive brightness? Is it all in vain?"

Doubt had fled. She stood with bowed head, and mouth quivering in a smile, swayed only by that passion-deep low voice. He loved her, then—and she—

But when that voice, which banished from her heart all echoes of the past, had ceased, returning memory smote her with a keen fierce pang. Of what had she been thinking? Had she no sense of honor left? Little more

than two years ago, beneath such a moon as this, had she not suffered another than Ruthven Erle—

“Let me go, let me go!” she cried vehemently, stung with the remembrance, struggling to withdraw her hand.

And he let her go—without one word—with but one glance at her averted face crimsoned with shame.

He let her go. She had almost gained the threshold, where was safety. Safety from herself—for that one glance of his had flashed upon her in outraged pride, and she knew that he relinquished her with the hand he coldly dropped upon the instant. In her inmost soul she felt that all was over—the dream had faded out forever. And she ventured, stunned into a calm despair, to pause one instant to look back upon it.

Aye, she felt he had not so much as moved to watch her. He stood there with his back toward her, his arms folded on his breast, his head uplifted haughtily.

She could not bear his anger, and know that she had seemed to trifle with him. Almost before thought could frame itself, she was before him.

Tears dropped fast and faster from her uplifted eyes, unconscious of them. Her lip quivered, and the upraised clasped hands were trembling. So much of childlike humility was in the attitude, so much of childlike trust and pleading in the face on which the moonlight fell, that his cold gaze melted slowly, and he held out his hand.

But hers did not waver to the yearning clasp. She still upheld them pressed against her bosom. And he marked the moonbeams flash and glitter on that ring.

“Mr. Erle,” she said, in a voice shaken as if drawn through sobs, which however came not, “I—I should have told you long ago that I—”

She broke down completely, covering her face, as she slipped the ring from her finger, and silently extended it.

As silently he bowed over it. The initials were only too well known, and he read, traced rudely within the golden circle: "Till death us do part."

Cold beads stood upon his brow, and the rigid lips just faltered, like a suppressed moan—

"My God!"

Then firmly and unhesitatingly he replaced the ring, pressing it there while he spoke in low and steady tones:

"Had I not feared this, two years ago I would have spoken. Yesterday I dreamed the fear unfounded. Forget what I have said to-night. For I—God knows I hold this bond as sacred as you can!"

He pressed the tiny hand passionately to his lips, and left her. She watched through rushing tears until he gained the road, and there paced up and down with measured pauseless tread. Fadette wondered, as she watched, how he could be so strong, so calm. His head was thrown back, his brow bared to the wind, as if he even drew enjoyment from the night. And with a bitter aching at her heart, a rebellious cry that he was suffering less, and should not see she grieved at all, she went within-doors, perhaps more vivacious in her gayety than ever.





CHAPTER XVIII.

PRAIRIE-COMBE.

"Just where the woodland met the flowery surf of the prairie."

EVANGELINE.

DOWN, Leo, down! So! Quiet, sir!"

Leo's companion, whom he had deserted to bound back at the sound of slow-treading hoofs behind, started at that voice, and a quick flush overspread her face. But before the new-comer had ridden up, and now flung himself from his horse, walking at her side, she had subdued the blush to an almost imperceptible heightening of color.

"On your way back to camp, Mr. Erle?" she asked, quickly.

"Yes. We march at dawn to-morrow. Yes"—as a sudden movement betrayed her surprise—"you did not stay up yonder in the library long enough to hear that fact confided to my aunt and Miss Matoaca."

"And you have paused here to say good-bye," she said, in a slow forced tone, after a moment, during which she had stooped to gather a spray of the crimson phlox which floated on the waves of verdure in her pathway, and which now, as with averted head she twined it carelessly in her dark braids, might seem to have stolen from her cheek its every trace of wonted bloom.

"No. I return this evening for a few hours."

Not one word more broke upon the silence. The glossy chestnut following his master's steps had thrust his head between the two, and the girl had laid her hand upon his flowing mane. Rnthven Erle's grasp fell slowly from the slackened bridle, and now rested very near those small white fingers, yet not touching them. For that ring glittered there in the evening sunshine, and for one instant he marked it shining steadily. Thus they walked on, she with lowered lashes, but he with gaze fronting steadfastly the boundless western horizon, and gathering strength and firmness moment by moment as he bared his uplifted brow to the freshening breeze. The deep-set dark-blue eyes were fronting determinedly the near parting and the future's after blankness, and the calm of fixed resolve had set the mouth's fine curves.

Months had gone by since the journey through the Arkansas swamp, and during their frequent intercourse he had never once given her word, nor, as she thought, look, denoting one feeling or one memory lingering of that time. Never before this evening had he sought her alone—never before, thus walked with her. And yet faith in his great love had grown upon her more and more. But seldom intruded those former doubts, remembrance of Amy's faithless wooer, or thought of Matoaca's—although Matoaca indeed he had sought unreservedly. Still, Fadette often felt there was a consciousness of her own presence even when he neither turned nor spoke—a guardianship, she sometimes thought, a tender sympathy, and a strength he willed to inspire into her fainting spirit, by which she bore up bravely, with never a sign of faltering.

Months had gone by, over a journey to Little Rock, a sojourn there, and a long and weary, perilous and exciting march in the wake of the Missouri cavalry, to that gallant band's own State. Here at last the wanderers from

"Beauregard" had found rest, guided by young Thorne to a familiar neighborhood, south of the Missouri, in a locality heretofore undisturbed. Mrs. Rutledge was comfortably installed in a retired country mansion, whence she could visit the yet somewhat distant St. Louis prison, with more security than if she had resided in the city.

And to-morrow was to sever the last link to the loved Confederacy—to leave them strangers in a strange land. For to-morrow the dashing "Light Horse" was to take up the line of march again for the armies of the South. Fadette went on downcast and flushed, and took no note of the evening and the scene around. But before Ruthven Erle, to whose resolute struggle had for the time followed a great calm, they spread with soothing influence. The prairie-grass, through which he waded on knee-deep, stretched out illimitable as a shoreless ocean from the mountain-spur behind, round which the two had just passed on. It surged and rippled with a tidal swell and murmur, in the onward sweep of the west wind. Each gust ruffled those green billowy undulations, tossing out for a moment long broken lines of gold and scarlet flowers, like the level sunset rays which now were blending with them. And as overhead rolled on the white, the dusky, and the golden-flaming evening clouds, their shadows pictured on the prairie the white-crested sun-flashing rolling ridges, the darksome, deep, engulfing hollows, of tempestuous seas. In the sinking fall and lull, from time to time, the hum of gaudy insects innumerable passed from bloomy tuft to tuft. Then came the chirrup of bright-hued birds westward winging their way to the mountains or to the tiny groves, which seemed to float, far-sprinkled wooded islets, on the heaving breast of ocean. Above for a moment the prairie-hawk flapped his broad pinions, and swooped a shadow over. A deer grazing in the distance reared his graceful head in-

quiringly above the waving sedges, and then bounded fleetly back to his leafy covert on the hillside. And silence brooded deeper. Gorgeous masses, brilliant canopies, and purple piles of sunset wafted slowly by, or melted away as a dream. The skies were cooling to neutral tints merging on the clear gray-blue, where the white moon, so long hanging there unshapen, began to lighten forth her bow. Fadette raised her head.

“I must go now. Leo will guard—” she began.

But the sentence remained unfinished. That sudden lifting of the lashes had surprised Ruthven Erle’s gaze, which for many moments had been dwelling on her face. It lingered yet an instant, and then he turned back with her, superseding Leo, he said, as far as the prairie’s edge, in order to say one last word, since he might not see her alone again.

He left the chestnut to her sole guidance now, folding his arms across his breast while he spoke.

That last word was all of advice and warning. He told her how the responsibility of thought for the welfare of the family must now devolve on her, since “our aunt’s” life was bounded in the distant prison, and she had neither time nor strength for aught beyond, while Matoaca Vaughan would naturally hesitate to assume authority. He explained minutely the business arrangements which he had made secretly through Harry Thorne’s uncle and county friends, and the management of the steady income to be drawn from the neighboring bank. Finally, he dwelt seriously upon the perils here surrounding “rebels,” and the extreme caution in word and deed which was requisite for their security.

“Have I alarmed you?” he said, meeting her wistful eyes with a smile. “Yet I know the will-o’-the-wisp, who has flitted hither and thither at her own wild will all her

bright young life, can and will at need steady her wayward light into a beacon. Now, little friend, I must have your promise not to forget, in your new care for others, that you are very dear to many, and that I must answer it to your two guardians that the precious trust which has devolved on me be rendered safely back. Will you take these duties as a pledge of confidence from me? And remember, when our path is toilsome, sharp, and cruel, and every onward step is marked with blood drawn from our very fainting hearts—yet when our strength is sinking, He will then uphold. And to struggle on unswervingly, surely that shall bring a man peace at the last.”

He bent his head reverently at these words. Fadette's tears were streaming fast, for she felt that they were spoken at the end for his own struggling spirit. She dashed the drops away, and turned to look at him. How her heart throbbed against the coldness she dared not forego! For she recognized him so above her girlish ideal hero, in his strength, his unwavering rectitude of purpose, the tenderness mingling with that stern, self-sacrificing firmness, which dared unshrinkingly the martyrdom of hopes that she felt in her inmost soul were the very life of his happiness. But Lionel seemed to stand between as she looked—seemed to stand, with his flashing black eyes, his regular features, the brilliant dark coloring of his face, his graceful lithe figure—beside this man, whose dark sombrero shaded features too strongly marked for beauty, and whose athletic frame in the battle-worn gray spoke less of grace than power. Was this a man to yield to Lionel?

But she hushed the clamoring thought, for he would have it so. And she said only—

“I will remember!”

They were nearing the edge of the prairie. Crags and wooded precipices of the mountain spur towered up

abruptly on the right, stretching away to the southeast. And in front, along the prairie, undulated fields and orchard closes, for perhaps half a mile, when the range made a bend around, encircling, and stretching thence northward along the prairie. It was an isolated spot. Despite the danger of intercourse with rebels, Ruthven Erle felt at liberty to loiter here beside Fadette. For the grassy road at the foot of the crags led only to that white villa-like cottage nestling fronting the prairie's verge, where those huge old blossoming locusts and lindens threw light shadows on the lawn's green level and flowery shrubbery. Full barns and windmill to the left, and pink and white orchard to the rear, with cultivated fields that sloped richly upward to the mountains closing in behind, betokened peace and plenty.

"I think I am leaving you in a haven of quiet," Ruthven Erle said, as he paused, to make Leo guardian for the last quarter of a mile. He could discern through the vines that clambered there, two dark figures pacing to and fro upon the piazza, and the white dresses of little Janet and Lily flitting at play in and out among the roses on the lawn, while the old Mammy, the only one of the servants who had accompanied the Beauregard wanderers, watched over them.

But as he paused, the taller of the two figures upon the piazza had disappeared.

Presently a man emerged from the trees, advancing rapidly. Ruthven Erle bent an earnest scrutinizing gaze upon him. For the appearance of one who did not wear the gray was no good omen. But he stood his ground, for were it friend or foe, he was already seen. Fadette was stroking in leave-taking the beautiful war-horse, rubbing his head against her shoulder, and she saw nothing, until a near step caused her to look behind her toward the house.

Ruthven Erle, as the new-comer approached, had started, and withdrawn somewhat, his hat pressed down over his brows. But Fadette did not observe, only with a glad cry of astonishment sprang forward.

“My guardian! My dear guardian!”

Ruthven Erle, watching, saw that every trace of melancholy was fled. The eyes were bright with joy which they alone could utter, the sweet lips were wreathed in smiles, and the flush of pleasure rose in her cheek. Both the little clinging hands were in his, and her smile was softest when for one instant his arm drew her close.

But when the eyes which searched the guardian’s face, as fearing change, brimmed over with sudden tears, noting the ravages confinement, want, and anxiety had made, and the gray lines threading here and there the dark hair—when with a quick impulse of loving sympathy the girl bowed her warm cheek upon the wasted hand—then Ruthven Erle turned aside with a muttered self-scornful “Fool!” And the crimson flower which a while ago she had dropped, and he unseen had lifted from the grass, now fell, crushed, from his hold, and he set his heel upon it.

After a moment, Mr. Randolph looked toward Fadette’s companion. Fadette, it was evident, had completely forgotten his presence.

“Pardon me, Sir, for thus interrupting your walk,” he began.

But Mr. Erle advanced, extending his hand.

“Perhaps,” he said, removing his hat, “Mr. Randolph may still remember Ruthven Erle, as Ruthven Erle may never forget Mr. Randolph’s more than generosity.”

Fadette stared in amazement while the two gentlemen met, cordially as old friends. But she had hardly time for wonder, before Mr. Erle addressed himself to her:

“‘God forgive you—I cannot. You have taken away

the escape I planned for him,'” he said, quoting her own words, very low, but with a quiet composure which might seem to brave them to the full.

She stood speechless, less astonished at the revelation than at her own blindness. A thousand memories rushed upon her. But not one of that anger she had more than once expressed, and of that bitter prejudice she had thought never to be forgotten. She remembered how often her light words must have seemed like taunts, and with what indulgence he had borne them. She heard, as though not hearing, the conversation of the gentlemen, and it scarcely caught her attention, when her guardian said, at last, that he would gladly join the southward march upon the morrow, though, the Confederacy reached, he purposed crossing the Mississippi and thence to Virginia, to enter his brother's regiment.

Then Mr. Erle, with the promise of a return in a few hours, took his leave.

He was passing Fadette with a bow. But she put out her hand hurriedly.

“Good-bye, Mr. Erle.”

It was all the lips uttered. But the eyes, lifted beseechingly to his, spoke more. In truth, the kind stranger of the St. Nicholas was more present to her mind, than one who had intervened between her guardian and freedom.

He waited until she, her hands clasped over her guardian's arm, was moving toward the cottage. Then he stooped, and raised that mangled flower from the trampled sod, flung himself upon his horse, and in an instant more was galloping at wild speed across the prairie.

They did not enter the low gate, but paced up and down without, where the boughs of the tall seringas and the roses trailed beyond the wire-fence in an archway, above a narrow path, scarcely worn in the grass. Fadette walked

on in an indistinct dream, and was hardly conscious of a thought. But at every turn her glance still followed the waving of Ruthven Erle's dark plume, until it suddenly struck off to that gap in the mountain-range. Her companion had been drinking in the beauty, the deep peace and comfort of the scene. And he now spoke almost as Ruthven Erle had spoken.

"Well, my little girl, I leave you in a haven of tranquillity."

She started, recalled by the sound of his voice.

"But, my dear guardian, you are not really going? And so soon? Are you quite sure you are strong enough?" she said, wistfully regarding him, and struck pale by the view of his wan and haggard countenance.

"Quite sure. I am not ill at all, only somewhat worn with captivity," he replied lightly to her anxious glance. "I must go with your Missouri friends, because the underground railway, in my experience, is no very practicable route. Years ago," he resumed after a pause, "beside the branching hedge, where the bay beneath rolled shoreward, like this prairie, and the lull of evening was on all—the last time your arm rested thus in mine, Fadette—you had eager messages for Lionel. And what shall they be now?"

Hot blushes surged so fast that they took away the power of utterance. She looked up hurriedly. He was smiling down upon her. But in her agitation she could not mark the profound melancholy of that smile, and it only seemed to mock the anguish he could not, and must not, understand. She burst into a passion of tears, and hid her face against her guardian's shoulder, as in the troubles of her childhood she had been wont to do.

But no strong arm drew her protectingly closer now; no deep voice soothed her, while she cried with bitter sobs—

"Oh, if I might but see Lionel—but see him once again! It is so long, so long to wait!"

It was the conviction of the moment, that since she could thus have changed, Lionel might hardly be the same—that in some way, some happy way, Lionel himself would break those shackles so entering into her soul, and set her free, and set himself free gladly too. But it was so long, so long to wait, she moaned again.

In more than the weakness of his long imprisonment, Mr. Randolph's right hand grasped the fence against which he stood. A heavy cloud gloomed on his brow; but it was forced away before Fadette regained her calmness with a struggle. And with deep, true tenderness, he dwelt upon the younger brother—with that unshaken Randolph honor, stablished on the rock of a heart unmoved by all the shocks of that fortune which had swept away the outward type—the old ancestral Randolph Honor. Fadette's heart seemed to faint and die, and lie all heavy and cold beneath her hand; and her downcast face grew paler in the twilight, when the guardian, to whom she still as of old looked up as to unwavering though indulgent rectitude, spoke of Lionel's fate in her keeping, and of the earnest faith she owed him—faith easier in the rendering, he continued, because from childhood she had known him well, and—

"Loved him!" Fadette almost gasped, in an accent that did not sound bitter, only because it was so hardly audible.

She walked on, benumbed with the aching sense of those chains she knew now that she could never dare to cast aside.

That night, when Ruthven Erle had bade farewell to his aunt and to Matoaca in the cottage library, Fadette parted from him there with a light touch of the hand, and turned away to cling to Mr. Randolph and sob her grief out on

his shoulder. While Ruthven passed out abruptly to the lawn, leaning in silence on his horse's neck, his hand clenched on the spot where hers had so lately rested.

Weeks after, on a far Virginia camping-ground, the elder brother calmly recounted to the younger the story of Fadette's tears. And Lionel passionately echoed Fadette's words: "It is so long, so long to wait!"





CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAVE.

"Ch'io se nel cor vi cerco, altri nol vede,
E sol mi vanto di nascosa fiamma,
E sol mi glorio di secreta fede."

TASSO.

WHOA, Dobbin, whoa!"

The voice rang out clear and silvery through the forest solitudes, and the slow tramp of old Dobbin stayed, and the grating sound of the rude wood-sledge, over the stones and through the fallen leaves, ceased.

The evening sunbeams slanted across the prairie, boundless to west and north, to the heights closing in here the southeastern horizon, and towering up, wooded range on range. The prairie, with this fringe of wood and mountain, waved golden-billowed in the sunshine, and numberless grazing herds blurred its bright surface. The cool calm of a September evening was in the air, and brooded yet deeper here beneath the woodland shades.

There stood old Dobbin, nothing loth to stand, while the speaker laid one gauntleted hand upon his leanest of lean necks, which not all the grass in those rich prairies could fatten into the semblance of youth. A strange driver for the raw-boned animal, that young girl who now paused, flushed with the ascent of the steep mountain-path, and drawing off one glove, pushed back with a tiny dimpled hand the dark hair from her temples. The broad straw-hat hung by its ribbons loosely round her throat, and, coarse

though its home-made plaits, looked picturesque and coquettish, adorned with that wreath of brilliant prairie-blossoms. Her dress, of the plainest of dark-blue prints, fitted exquisitely the gracefully rounded figure, and was looped from contact with damp leaves and mosses over the whitest of white skirts, revealing a dainty foot.

"Heigho!" she sighed, fanning herself with a branch of hazel broken from the copse; "I wish my unknown wood-chopper would but make his appearance, and relieve me of the lading of the sledge. However, I ought not to grumble, for I have had harder work in the last six months than this. To think of having all our summer fuel thus cut and stacked by invisible hands!"

She pushed aside the branches as she spoke, and there, as she had said, was a stack of fuel, cut so that without great labor she had soon laid it stick by stick upon the sledge. Then she stooped, parting a knot of clustering bushes obscuring the opening of a hollow tree which overhung the cliff.

"Ah! here is our weekly hamper again, full as ever."

She knelt down upon the sward, and drew it forth from the place of concealment, holding up to view, each time with fresh delight, the sacks of flour, coffee, sugar, and the ham, on which for several months, in her station as house-keeper, she had been accustomed to look as the bulk of her weekly larder. One by one, she hid them beneath the wood, and was replacing the hamper, when a ring of something within caught her attention. A well-filled purse dropped from her astonished hold.

A hundred dollars in shining gold pieces! It was long, long since the eager girl had touched, had counted so much. Yet when it was all counted piece by piece in her lap, she bent over it a face in which dismay predominated above amazement.

Her thoughts flew back, as she pondered, over the more than year of her trust which Ruthven Erle had given. She had not in that space once seen him, to render an account. Faithfully and constantly had she striven, however, to fulfil it. For the first months it was an easy task. The regular income, well-managed, had afforded sufficient support, and ample means for the comfort of the prisoner, who was the first thought of every member of the household. But last spring the isolation of the prairie-home was broken by guerrillas banding in the mountains, and one of the number, wounded to the death, had staggered to Mrs. Rutledge's door, and been tended by her that night until he breathed his last. Since then, pillage had followed fast on pillage, until the rebel sympathizers were laid waste in field and byre. And bank-stock vanished, only a slender sum might be relied on, in trust with an uncle of Harry Thorne's. But the sum was little more than that from the beginning devoted to Mr. Rutledge. So Matoaca and Fadette, with the faithful old Mammy, now sole servant, had in concert determined to draw upon this as little as possible, had cultivated with their own hands a garden-patch, and economized in every possible way. Gladly would the two girls, by any exertion, have added to their income, but this was impossible in their lonely situation, and they were determined to weather through the summer, at least, together. Of all this, Mrs. Rutledge knew little. Fadette had striven, since she had assumed the household management, to relieve her aunt's mind from the pressure of cares other than those which must of necessity weigh upon her—constant thought for the prisoner, and constant exertions for his release. He was yet in close confinement, under the unsubstantial charge of crossing arms to the Trans-Mississippi.

Yet, reviewing this trial-time, Fadette acknowledged that not all exertion, all economy, would have saved from utter want, had it not been for a mysterious aid.

Vividly back upon her memory came that bright June evening when she had strayed with Leo hither to her wonted haunt, and had found a fairy missive, addressed to herself, at the root of this old tree, directing her to the dark hollow for treasure-trove. After a dinnerless day, and with nothing to look forward to before the scanty breakfast of the morrow, it was hardly surprising that she did not thrust aside the well-filled hamper, but that she not only made Leo assist her in carrying it home, but strictly obeyed the reiterated injunction of absolute secrecy. Nor was it strange that she should come again and again, at the close of every week, as a second billet entreated, urging that the writer was thus paying a debt which weighed upon his conscience, and which it was impossible otherwise to cancel. Nearly three months had thus gone by. Provisions and fuel were stored for her with unfailing regularity, while she neither sought, nor desired to find, the clue to the hidden donor. In her own mind, she was assured of his identity with a false friend, who, to shield himself and his own property, had made a scape-goat of her aunt's. She did not draw any logical conclusions upon the subject. But she felt that a remnant of conscience would prompt some rendition, while her indignation, both for the wrong and for the wrongful righting, made her loth to put herself in a position to acknowledge the latter.

Meantime, there lay the gold, which not for an instant could she think of thus receiving. Her first impulse was to return it to the hamper, which she knew would be sought for and replenished before another week. But should the hitherto unmolested covert be disturbed by any means, and

the purse lost, how could she ever repay? She would consult Matoaca, at least, and must take the contemned lucre home for safety.

She had put up the coins, still kneeling there with thoughtfully bowed head and a line of care contracting her brows.

"If I have done wrong in all these months," she said aloud, slowly pondering, "as I begin to fear I have— Well, well, too late to think of that. Why, Leo, you troubled too? And what do *you* think of this? Come, sir, your advice, if you please!"

She held the purse suspended over the dog's nose, which he, the while lying at her feet, had rested reposefully upon his forepaws. But when she began to speak, he had lifted his head, and his ears erected themselves as at some sound which she had not observed. His quick, intelligent eyes were fixed intently upon the overhanging thicket, and with one snuff at the dangling purse, in utter disregard of, and almost oversetting, his mistress, he suddenly leaped from her side, and off, up the crag, with short sharp barks of delight, in the direction of a rustling through the bushes.

"Here, Leo, Leo, where are you going?" Fadette cried, alarmed at the defection of her powerful protector.

But he only responded to her call by returning to her side for one moment, and then bounding away again as before. She stood an instant irresolute. Then, her curiosity excited by the dog's strange behavior, she followed.

Pushing through the dense undergrowth, she went on and on, seeing nothing save the rustling of the boughs which the dog in his rapid movements displaced, hearing nothing save his eager panting and her own hurried breathing.

Now the animal left the more open crag on which she had stood, overlooking the prairie, and penetrated deeper and deeper into the recesses of the mountain. How far

they had gone Fadette knew not. But fear began to get the better of curiosity, and she stood still, calling once more upon Leo, Leo, of whom she had lost sight.

A crashing of the branches followed on her call, and Leo reappeared. But he only stayed to rub his head against her extended hand. He was off again as before, with so piteous a whine, that she could not but follow, even when presently he couched down among a clump of bushes, and whined there till she approached. Then she saw him twist and turn himself through what appeared to be a narrow aperture between two rocks. She hesitated; but, more interested than ever, and confiding in the intelligence of her conductor, she followed with difficulty, crouching through the aperture, near enough always to touch with outstretched hand the shaggy coat of her conductor, who thus preceded her into danger, if danger there was. But, truth to tell, her fears had scarcely a form, and excitement predominated over them. When on a sudden her eyes, accustomed to the darkness of the passage, were dazzled by a glare of light.

When in her fright she could observe, she saw that that light was flaring from a blazing pine-torch held aloft by a figure in the far end of the cave—for cave it was into which she had thus entered. "Leo, Leo," she called, in tones suffocated with terror. But Leo had deserted her, was leaping on the stranger in an ecstasy of frantic joy. And the stranger—yes, he actually was coming toward her. Blind with fear, she turned and groped for the passage by which she had come. But she sank down, daring not to venture into its narrow intricacies, and so turn her back upon the unknown. Cowering there, her head buried on her knees, she awaited with every misgiving that approach.

It was of no ordinary mortal presence that, she thought. That strange misshapen figure suggested to her rather

wild alarms of dwarf and brownie, and the mildest that occurred to her memory was Elshie of Mucklestane Moor. Till now she almost felt the light of the torch flaring upon her bowed head, and the footsteps stayed before her. Just then something cold touched her hand. With a wild shriek she started up. Only Leo—who now laid his head on her knee, yet one instant looking up with a joyful whine to the figure before her. She too summoned courage to look.

Truly no dwarf, no brownie, no canny Elshie—but a poor harmless idiot hunchback, whom Fadette had met some two or three times in her rambles, and with whom Leo had from the first struck up an affectionate acquaintance.

Fadette rose, smiling at her fears. And yet she could not repress a quick shiver of something between dread and repugnance when she stood facing this strange being in the torch-lit darkness and solitude of the cavern. The red flame flickered upon rugged walls of rock, and roof that stooped low and irregularly above her, sometimes shelving to within a few feet of the ground, sometimes vaulted to a considerable height. The cave's breadth was slight, but it would seem that in length it extended further into the mountain, since the torch failed to strike a ray against any wall in that direction. This might have been once the subterranean bed of a mountain stream, which through the entrance-aperture had forced its way, and which some freak of Nature had now shut out from all return, veiling the passage with her densest of green screens. Yet, chillingly dismal as was this cave, there were signs of habitation. In one corner a pair of coarse blankets were folded one upon the other; on a rocky table were the remains of a repast; and against the wall there leaned a fowling-piece.

In an instant Fadette had marked all this, and with awakened curiosity she scrutinized the probable hermit.

He was a man upon whose age it was difficult to speculate, but whom most would have pronounced as past youth, so haggard was the countenance but partially seen beneath the shadowy slouched hat, and which the long black unkempt hair and beard rendered still more weird and salvage. The hand which upheld the torch was certainly well-shapen, but observation seldom went beyond the uncouth grotesqueness of the figure. Fadette's could not now. Her eyes dropped; though, reassured by a gentle gleam of his dark ones, her heart beat less heavily. She was just pondering on retreat, and wondering whether Leo might not be made rear-guard, when the dog's cold nose again was laid upon her hand. Only just laid there, for anon he bounded off, and leaped caressingly upon the motionless hunchback.

Fadette grew more and more amazed in view of her rough pet's wild conduct. Again and again would he return, just touch her fingers, and spring away to fawn upon the stranger. That sage old Leo should so suddenly be losing his sagacity was, to her respect for it, incomprehensible. And she paused, her attention fixed closely upon him.

"The purse, the purse!" she cried after a moment, becoming convinced that it was that, still clasped in her hand, which the dog had scented, thus tracing it to him who had laid it in the hollow tree. Yes, of that there could remain no doubt—every moment the animal made it clearer and clearer.

Fadette stood irresolute, more confused than ever, in the effort to reconcile the wretched being before her, and that drear abode, with the hamper and the shining coins. Presently it flashed across her mind that it was not as donor, but as emissary, that the hunchback had touched the purse. What more possible, to say the least, than that her aunt's false friend should choose a messenger incapaci

tated by nature from betraying, as his employer had betrayed? Acting on the impulse, she held out the purse toward him. If she were rash, she said to herself, she had a diamond brooch, sole relict of her jewel-casket, which, though she valued it as her guardian's gift, must go to replace this money, should it be lost, as she would ere long contrive to ascertain.

"I will put this purse again into the hamper," she said slowly and impressively, recollecting she had heard that idiots have, in parrot-style, remembered and repeated messages. "Go you, and tell him who sent you with it, he shall pay his debt as before, and not with gold."

Looking on him intently, she seemed to catch one gleam of intelligence in the dark eyes which met her own. But the next instant they were lowered from hers, an insensate blankness passed over the countenance, and an incoherent jumbling of unmeaning words was muttered forth—mildly and good-naturedly, however—through the heavy beard.

Fadette was relieved from her lingering doubt, while still the purse was in her power. For when she and Leo had passed out into the twilight air again, a hasty step behind showed that they were followed. Fadette succeeded in retaining her canine escort, and passed on rapidly. As she came in view of her oaken storehouse, she saw the hunchback near it, stoop, and drawing the hamper from concealment, unhesitatingly advance to her, holding the lid back. Unhesitatingly she dropped the purse within. And he shouldered the burden, and turned back on his path.

She pursued hers, wending homeward with old Dobbin, all the lighter that she did not bear that purse's weight.

And that it may be lifted finally from this page—Fadette on the ensuing "hamper-day" received, in the feigned handwriting of her first billet, an acknowledgment of the rendition.



CHAPTER XX.

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

"There are currents that flash through the spirit, and crash
Like the clouds on the air,
While the visor is closed and the frame looks composed
As as infant at prayer;—
Storms that come from a stir or a breath or a sigh,
To drag out of the Past
Shapes of passion abjured, and of outrage endured."

A. J. REQUIER.

ANOTHER week went by. Another sunset of lambent glow was flooding the vast and lone expanse of prairie, when homeward, down the mountain-side, plodded old Dobbin again, with his sledge of fuel and provisions. The rude rope-reins hung loosely on Fadette's arm, as she walked on beside the ancient gray. Yet the task of guiding that meditative sage might seem to have devolved upon the hunchback, who followed close behind, and who, as now and then she turned to observe him, with uncouth yet friendly gestures urged on the animal, muttering the while incoherent phrases and snatches of wild song.

This harmless creature for months had crossed her path, seemingly as attached and as faithful as his demonstrative friend Leo, now fawning at his side. Mysterious agent of her mysterious supplies, he to-day had himself loaded her sledge, and was now following, as if to guard her home. Yet Fadette could never look upon him without an inward shudder, and a shrinking which she had not always taken care to repress, until she once caught, beneath the broad

black hat always pressed low upon his brows, a pained gleam of the dark eyes. That at once placed the innocent nearer the level of humanity, and mingled something of tender pity in her manner. Notwithstanding the natural repulsion of his aspect, since he had more than once, after the cave adventure, joined Leo in her rambles at the close of the day's toil, she had speedily learned to regard him as a lawful unobtrusive retainer, like Leo, and to feel additional protection in his presence.

Therefore she walked on leisurely, while twilight shades were gathering in. Round the precipitous angle, the not distant walls of the cottage were visible between foliage which had yet begun scarcely to manifest a faint yellow tinge of autumn. Fadette noted with a passing sadness the desolate aspect of untrimmed and overgrown lawn, orchard broken down and stripped of fruit, and fields beyond, where weeds run riot. But it was an aspect to which months had inured her, and presently she had stooped to the tall grass rustling round and closing on her footsteps, and had gathered among it a rich handful of the lingering prairie-flowers. Among these, as she arranged and rearranged the brilliant hues, she espied a tuft of that ubiquitous weed, of golden heart and snowy petals, by courtesy yclept daisy. And as she had often done at Randolph Honor and at "Beauregard," she forthwith essayed to do here at Prairie-Combe—that is, to consult Dame Fortune at the oracle which Goethe renders classic. So, like his Margaret, she stripped off leaflet by leaflet, and tossed them to the wind. "He loves me"—"he loves me not"—"he loves me!" The first blossom had proved propitious, and she began by a second to test the truth of its weird.

It would seem she had full faith in the oracle, for her eyes brightened, and her color deepened to a blush tinging even the blue-veined temples, while the lips which so softly

formed the words, quivered somewhat, and so quivered into fast-flitting smiles. Pacing there, absorbed, her head bent over her fate-flower, she was unconscious of the hunch-back's near approach, and of the stealthy gaze he fastened on her face. The flash of those shaded eyes, in other than the idiot's countenance, would have been eloquent of eager breathless hope, of fear, and doubt, and passionate tenderness. Yet had Fadette caught the expression, she would have judged it but another of those fantastic pranks of Nature, by which the most pitiful of her creations may lift our thoughts one moment—

“ — the true Pan,
Who by low creatures, leads to heights of love.”

The gaze was unseen. Leo's friend fell back, when other hoof-beats mingled with Dobbin's, and through the grass another horse pushed on. His rider sprang to the ground almost at Fadette's side. She turned suddenly at the sound, the mutilated daisy in the act of further dismemberment, and the audible “he loves me,” yet upon her lips.

“And who is it that loves you?” were Ruthven Erle's first words, as she stood still, and with a faint cry of joy unspeakable yielded her hand to his firm clasp.

She stole a quick glance up into his eyes. They were resting upon her face with such a full deep sense of perfect repose and content, that intuitively she knew they had yearned for that vision through all this more than year. Her blushes came fast and faster, and she had answered nothing, had not even uttered a syllable of greeting, when he drew her arm within his, and they walked slowly homeward thus together.

Many were the questions to which she must now reply. And for the first time she, with deprecating, timid glances, confided the secret of the hollow oak. But though there

his brows contracted one instant, the next he had but smiles and commendations, and assertion of his full faith in his little trustee.

The hunchback followed, unheeded, to the gate. Moment by moment his brow lowered, as he watched the two, who, with no word, no glance of love that passed the guard thus placed on eyes and lips, yet went on thus together as if their steps through life were destined to wend ever side by side. Now his nether lip was compressed, and his hand, which rested on Leo's shaggy head, clenched so violently, that the animal, with a low growl, looked round in search of the disturber of his friend's tranquillity. Ruthven Erle was at that moment saying, that now he was here to arrange those woful money-matters, she should no longer be dependent upon the precarious bounty of any dryad of the oaks.

One ray of something akin to joy had for an instant illumined the dark watching face. Ruthven Erle had fixed on him a scrutinizing gaze, and then turned to the young girl, asking who her singular escort might be. The harsh word "idiot" had faltered upon Fadette's lips, and she had substituted—

"An—innocent, as kindly Scots would say. Indeed you do not know, Mr. Erle, how much I am indebted to him. He seems almost of right my protector—like dear old Leo here."

And so they reached the gate.

"Oh, Missy, Missy!"

"What is it, Mammy?" cried Fadette, starting up alarmed, as the faithful old woman unceremoniously threw open her chamber-door.

It was nearly two hours since the inmates of Prairie-Combe had parted for the night, yet Fadette had not

sought repose, but had sunk back in her easy-chair, still dressed. Her eyes closed to the feeble glimmer of her low lamp; bright waking dreams were flitting through her mind so fast, that she was unconscious of the lapse of time.

"Soldiers, honey—the house all surrounded. Captain say he must have feed for the horses right away. Whar Mars' Ruthven? He'll be done took now sure—"

"The dark lantern, Mammy—quick!" Fadette interrupted, springing up. "Your Mars' Ruthven is not in the house, but sleeping in the barn-loft. I have the key here, and we will—yes, we *will* save him! Get the lantern, and we will go up ourselves and throw down the oats required. I'll awake Miss Janet, and meet you at the door."

She stood very composedly upon the piazza steps, answering the armed men below, with some feeling of security, even while their bayonets flashed out from time to time in the moonbeams struggling through drifting clouds. For her two protectors, Leo and the hunchback, were close beside her, the latter curbing the low growling anger of his companion by a hand laid on his head. The soldiers were sufficiently civil, the captain even going so far as to express an apologetic regret for this midnight intrusion, rendered unavoidable, as he explained, by a long march since sunset, and the necessity for repose and refreshment until dawn. For there was important service to be accomplished in the coming day, he said with some importance.

Fadette's lip curled, even as it paled. But she returned answer graciously enough, for she felt that only by so doing would she be permitted to do the honors of the barn-loft. Therefore, when the lantern appeared, Fadette's proposal met with no objection.

"Come, Mammy," said Fadette, taking the light from her hand.

But as the hunchback made a movement as if he too would follow, and Leo bounded forward to her side, she turned hastily, whispering—

"No—stay—your Miss Janet or Miss Matoaca may need you. I think I hear them coming down even now. And oh, Mammy, have a care of the silver spoons," she added yet lower.

Rapidly, yet curbing her impatient gait to the pace of the soldiers, about fifty in number, who led their horses trampling after, she crossed the lawn, and reached the barn, which stood upon the prairie's verge.

As she turned the ponderous key in the lock her hand trembled, and for an instant she leaned there powerless. What if she could not deter the men from following? What if she should thus be opening the door the sooner to his foes? Yet at the worst, she might suddenly extinguish the light, and so afford a slender chance of escape in the confusion. At all events, the door must be opened. The necessity nerved her to push it wide on creaking hinges before her hesitation was observed.

Her timid plea of waste and trampling of the grain was admitted, and, with the hunchback, she received permission to mount the ladder to the loft, while the men remained without. Poor Leo whined remonstratingly when she stationed him on guard at the ladder's foot, bidding him lie down, and pointing to the doors, that had now swung to, in token that he was to watch. But as she would not relent, he resignedly couched down, dropped his muzzle on his paws, and fixed a vigilant eye in the direction which she signified.

She held aloft the lantern on gaining the high-raftered loft, spacious enough to have contained stores heaped on

stores, instead of this scant supply, which ill-conditioned Dobbin might visibly have reduced in one day of plenty.

The light flared full upon the hay, which was piled close beside the long, broad window or doorway, from which, as if for air, the shutter had been withdrawn. And there, upon that fragrant couch, lay Ruthven Erle, outstretched in deep unbroken slumber.

Fadette drew near, turning the dark side of the lantern so that those who waited beneath the window might see nothing.

He had evidently thrown himself down there, to rise prepared for any surprise. The arm on which his head was pillowed, had hardly even in sleep relaxed its hold of a pistol, and his hat lay close beside. Yet though danger was present to him, dreams were not of it, for as she knelt there, shielding him from the window, a smile passed over his face. She laid a light touch on the hand flung across his breast, for she feared to rouse him suddenly, lest in the waking by some hasty movement he might disclose himself, in Confederate uniform as he was, to those below.

"Mr. Erle!" she called softly—"Mr. Erle!"

The eyes opened on her for an instant, dreamful still, and the hand closed firmly upon hers.

"My darling! my little one! at last—at last—" he murmured. And then the words died away in indistinct utterance, and again the regular breathing told of a sleep unbroken.

Fadette blushed crimson. But a dark face looking down over her shoulder as she knelt, turned ghastly pale. There was a strange gleam of the eyes, and the white set teeth for one moment flashed out in a grim smile through the heavy black beard.

"At last—at last!" he muttered. "And at last I will—nay, I will—have my revenge!"

He had taken one step toward the window, with that baleful glare as of a goaded lion. But the movement roused Fadette.

She put out her hand and touched his, clenched until the nails had pierced the flesh. Her uplifted eyes were dazed with fast-coming tears, which pleaded with her words :

"Ah, go, go—throw them out—there, there is a spade—these oats. Quick, quick—one moment for life! Ah, if you love me—poor fellow, he understands—will he do it? One moment to save him, my—Lionel, Lionel, God knows I would be true to you!"

She almost gasped the last words out, bending over the slumberer again, and almost forgetful of her prayer to the huuchback. But he, who had stood irresolute, sprang forward even as she ended. And the first spadeful of oats passed, on its downward way, the vociferous rising clamor for the cause of delay.

A second attempt, and then a third, and Ruthven Erle's eyes again opened—this time roused slowly into a long earnest gaze of anxious surprise. Fadette did not give him space to speak.

"Armed men below," she whispered. Stay—you must move cautiously—they will else see you from the window. What shall I do? They are here to feed the horses, and when all the oats and hay are thrown to them, they will hardly believe me, but will mount, no doubt, to see for themselves. Tell me what to do, Mr. Erle!"

"Why, yonder is a pile of oats sufficient."

"Ah, but all damaged."

"Listen, then," he said quickly. "Bid your squire of dames toss down some of the damaged oats, and when they will grumble, do you request them to go round to the opposite side of the barn, whence you must lavish the good grain. A leap in the dark is my only hope of escape. Of

course they will hear me, but, once upon the ground—they are all dismounted, you say?—it is but man to man, and the odds in my favor, I being remarkably fleet-footed, while they must lose time in confusion. But should the worst come to the worst”—he hastily drew forth a package of papers—“you shall take these. If any thing happens—nay, there will not, my little friend—destroy them. But I shall return in a few days to claim them, as they are army papers of importance. Where am I going? Why, the gallant little guerrilla squad under whose wing I am recruiting at present would be swallowed up by this force, so we will change our camp for—”

The name was audible only to her, while the hunchback, who unbidden had already tossed down several spadefuls of the damaged grain, might have seemed to pause an instant to hear. Just then a curse was returned in exchange for the bad provender. And Fadette called out—

“Gentlemen, I fear the oats here are damaged. If you will go round to the opposite side of the barn—”

A trampling of horses and of men, a ringing of sabres and of carbines, and the coast was clear.

Ruthven Erle sprang to his feet, as Fadette rose, in her breathless anxiety entirely forgetful that all this while he had not relaxed the clasp of her hand. The hunchback, still pauselessly shovelling out the grain, cast a glance over his misshapen shoulder, as the two stood for a moment there together.

No, not one word of love in this parting full of agony. Only one closer pressure of the hand before he let it fall helplessly to her side—only one long gaze in the great startled eyes that never wavered from his—a husky voice, which immediately he nerved to cheerfulness, saying:

“Courage!—and God bless my little friend!”

He swung himself lightly from the window—a heavy, dull thud followed.

Fadette had just strength and thought enough to stagger to the window in view of the men, as they started at the sound. And with one long piercing shriek, she fell heavily to the floor, in a deep swoon.

That shriek brought numbers thronging up the ladder. And the two or three who had seen and pursued the fugitive, were easily eluded and distanced in their confusion.

Fadette had instantly been lifted in the strong arms of the hunchback, and they pressed the slight form closer and closer, while passionate kisses were showered upon lips and brow, and low words of longing tenderness were murmured.

But before the foremost soldier had gained the loft, and Matoaca and Mrs. Rutledge, followed by the terrified servant, with both children in her charge, won their way through the crowd, the idiot hunchback had withdrawn, gibbering and pointing with incoherent words at the prostrate girl.

When she unclosed her eyes, they met her aunt bending over her; and she heard the low whisper—

“He is saved, my child.”

No shadow of suspicion seemed to rest on the girl, as she confirmed the story of those men who had seen the fugitive, and thus accounted for her terror.





CHAPTER XXI.

AN AUTO DA FÉ.

"The old thorns shall grow out of the old stem."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

FADETTE lounged in her chamber-window early in the night ensuing. She gazed out, across the "tangle-wild" lawn to the far-spread prairie, where rolled and wavered and swept on those billowy drifts of white-foam mists, here and there tinged golden in the moonlight, and tossed downward from the mountains in the southward distance.

The day had been a quiet one, the soldiery departing with the dawn, and no trace of them or of the bushwhackers, of whom they were doubtless in pursuit. No word, either, of Mr. Erle. But Fadette was confident of his having long since reached the guerrilla band, and all pressure of immediate anxiety was over.

As she lounged there, the prairie narrowed, in her vision, to a leafy rock-intrenched covert—such a covert as the partisan comrades must even now be resting in. The lines which Amy had repeated in "Swamp Angels' Rest," seemed intended for the scene before her, and for that on which imagination was now dwelling. For though indeed no dreamful lake lay there, yet silvered mists were sleeping like a flood with grasses streaming on its bosom, and the heavens in the shadowy night were stooping low to earth :

And there, where the boughs stir apart in the gloaming,
Moving drowsily back for dreams going and coming,
They sleep—though the wood-tick is sounding alarms,
And the night-owl forebodeth—they sleep on their arms,
That band of guerrillas.

However, no measured tread now shook the turf, and if the flowers wept, they wept no tears of blood, but rather glistening dews of tranquillity untroubled.

Fadette's tranquillity, as she leaned from the window, was broken by a movement through the shrubbery a stone's throw from the house. There, even while her lips went on mechanically with the murmured verse, her attention was fixed. The density of branching lindens lay between, and clouds that in the rising wind fled fast across the moon, gloomed also on the lawn. But when those shadows tossed apart, and flickering beams leaped out between, she saw, or thought she saw, a creeping something dragging its slow dark length along in this direction. Now it surely lifted itself erect, an undefined form in the shelter of that dense clump of cedars. And again it was lost to sight.

She had started up, and bent forward, yet prudently shielding herself behind the curtains, though with a misgiving that this precaution came too late. The idea had suddenly suggested itself that this might be a straggler of the company here last night.

With a shudder she took up the small silver-mounted pistol which, still innocent of blood, had been so long companion of her wanderings. But she breathed a deep breath of relief as she laid it down again, remembering that were this a midnight robber, his fellows doubtless were in hearing, and the reverberation of that pistol-shot might involve Prairie-Combe in ruin all the speedier.

Yet though she blenched before so desperate a deed, she had no will to yield helplessly to any foe. That fearful

night at "Sleepy Hollow" swept back upon her, and nerved her into firmness.

She waited.

One flash of the moon had disclosed to her the figure of a man. And she knew, even by the treacherous twilight, how he crept on through the openings, and pushed on through the bushes, in the endeavor to remain unseen.

And now—yes, she knew, though the moon was hopelessly enshrouded—he stood beneath this very window. And now—and now was climbing with slow caution up the rose-wreathed trellis, which would bring him within his length of the lattice.

Since the danger had reached her at the last, no muscle quivered. Her resolve was made. While she stood there on guard, straining her sight through the dark for those clinging hands she knew must be ever lifting her enemy nearer, through her memory had thrilled the story of a spectral hand which thrust itself through a broken pane in a weird old mansion; and of the watcher within, who caught the wrist and dragged it ruthlessly to and fro against the keen-edged glass, until at length it threatened him no more. And this window—there was her danger; there also might be her security. The massive old-timed oaken sash, so cumbrous to uplift, so swift to fall with heavy thud by its own weight, she raised from its support and upheld with both arms, ready for a swoop on such unwary members as must venture under. She turned her thoughts resolutely away, which pictured the maimed wretch, his hold powerless and crushed, staggering upon his perilous foothold—reeling backward—crashing down among the rose-boughs—huddled in a heap below there, senseless, shattered, perchance dead. She turned her thoughts away, waiting with undaunted courage, though with marble lip and cheek. She stood, somewhat shielded

by the curtains, yet keeping ceaseless vigil down upon the climber, a mere dark blot within the gloom, against the wall.

For thunder-clouds were hurrying together after the sultry summer-like day, and the moon had dropped behind a bank of midnight blackness. Fadette could hardly see, but seemed to feel that shadow creeping up and up, until it gained the topmost trellis-bar. One instant, and the arm's-length grasp must close upon the window-ledge. One instant, and that ponderous oak must fall, a thunderbolt of vengeance, hurling down destruction. She stood prepared.

One hand had groped its way there, clutching fast the sill. She had just caught the rustling motion, and at the same time the moon broke forth triumphantly from her imprisonment—broke forth as if to guide the other hand, now stretched out upward too. And now Fadette must act. Relentless and ghastly as the death she would award, she yet leans slightly forward for one glimpse of her foredoomed victim.

One glimpse—A glad cry of wonder parted her white lips. And the grasp erewhile so steady, trembled almost powerlessly, as with difficulty she succeeded in securing the sash in its old position.

For it was the uncouth figure of the hunchback, which the reappearing moon revealed. Another movement, and he had sprung through the window into the apartment.

But Fadette shrank back, the first feeling of relief gone. Now that she had through her own thoughtless impulse admitted him, a horror seized her—thus alone with an unreasoning being in the dead hour of the night, with not one human soul to aid, should his accustomed gentleness desert him, and frenzy take possession of the wild misshapen form. Such a change would have been scarcely more surprising than his appearance at this time, in this manner.

She retreated a few paces, putting her right hand nervously upon the pistol as it lay and glittered in the moonbeams shifting on the table. She did so, however, less with the thought of self-defence than of keeping the weapon from his sight. An irrepressible shudder of disgust and terror shook her, and she stretched out her left hand with a strong repellant gesture.

The hunchback stood irresolute. She marked the ominous lowering of his black brows. But before the shriek which trembled on her lips could leave them, he had suddenly dropped upon one knee before her, bowing his head in silence, and extending a folded slip of paper.

She drew near and took it from him, not without a tremor, but also with vehement self-reproach. And, striking a light, she bent eagerly over the writing.

There were but a few lines, the feigned characters those of her provident genius of the hollow oak. Fixed in the belief that this mysterious personage was identical with the false friend of her aunt, the recognition filled her with distrust. And as she read and re-read the paper for the third time, that feeling grew yet stronger.

The writer intimated that Federal troops in numbers were shortly to rendezvous in the vicinity, for the purpose of penetrating to the mountainous retreat of a bushwhacking band—with whom she, Fadette, was known to be in correspondence, he asserted. And he besought her to send him, by the bearer, directions whereby he might convey to that retreat a timely warning.

The young girl's brows contracted in anxiety and doubt. But ere long the indignant blood rose in her cheek, and she tore the paper in a thousand fragments, setting her small foot upon them. So! make her the agent of his treachery! Or ruin her aunt yet further, having proof of her complicity with hunted-down and outlawed rebels!

She did not stay to contrast this purpose with the friendliness or the remorse to which the oak bore witness. She dared not trust those lives, so many and so dear, to a senseless messenger and to a coward traitor—or an unknown, at the best. She herself would bear the message, and at once.

In the excitement of that resolution she totally forgot the envoy, who meantime had risen, still regarding her fixedly.

With a noiseless though hurried step, she quitted the apartment and descended the stairs, traversing the hall to the rear of the house, where she cautiously opened a door.

There lay the old "Mammy," as negroes are wont; oblivious of her comfortable room and bed, wrapped in her blanket, her feet outstretched to the glowing kitchen fire.

Fadette stooped and touched her, and she started up, on the alert at once, as if yet accustomed to the summons of "Miss little Janet's" babyhood.

"Up, Mammy, and lock the front door after me," the girl said hastily. "So surprised? Yes, I am indeed going out. I have a word for Mars' Ruthven which, if I deliver not to-night, he must be made a prisoner. Go with me? Indeed, I wish you could. You know there is no horse but Mars' Ruthven's, which you and I this morning hid, and I must ride for dear life. Come, come—and remember you are to awake no one, but watch for me yourself. I will be here in safety before dawn."

And disregarding all dissuasive whisperings, she led the way into the hall. She was turning toward the front, when she perceived that the hunchback had already thrown open a side-door, and was standing on its threshold. So she passed out there, once more repeating her directions to

the servant, but yet somewhat regretful that she could not shut within her uncouth companion, who now seemed bent upon accompanying her.

Hoping to escape his further observation, she walked quickly on, without appearing to notice him. But he drew near when she would have taken the path which crossed the lawn, and catching her shawl, strove to draw her gently toward the shelter of the trees in the rear. She hesitated, but obeyed. For her aunt's chamber, as well as her own, commanded the lawn, and the least sound beneath those windows was of all things that which Fadette was most desirous to avoid.

Once in the leafy shelter, and winding cautiously through the orchard wilderness, she believed her follower could not but have lost all trace of her. And secure in this, she gained the woodland at the mountain's foot. There, still tethered in a rock-hid glen, she found Ruthven Erle's horse. Hastily she saddled and bridled him, and throwing one stirrup across in lieu of a pommel, sprang to her seat, and was off at a speed commensurate with the animal's own wild delight at freedom from the day's restraint.

Every winding of the road was known to her. During the first year of sojourn in Missouri, while yet all prospered, she had been wont to rove the country through at will, and one morning had chanced upon this very covert of the partisan-ranger.

The moon was clouded hopelessly, only redeeming the darkness to a dismal leaden tinge. And before she had ridden far, the long-pent storm broke forth. It was no furious tempest, but the rain dripped drearily, until the lonely rider was thoroughly chilled, despite her urgent speed. Her heart beat with foreboding as she listened to the thunder's sullen mutterings, deep-drawn among those rocky solitudes. Now and then, as she paused and waited

for the lightning to point out her way along a yet more hazardous defile, or up a rugged height, she seemed to hear, above the clashing of the boughs that surged against each other, and through the dirge-like sougning in the pines, a clatter as of horse's hoofs that followed in the distance. Once she thought she saw, with all her senses strained in anxious dread, a something moving toward her through the brush. Yet when she listened, when she looked again, only the storm-blare flickered on some ragged branch, only a stone or broken bough plunged downward with a hollow echo from some crag.

Fast, despite the darkness and the toilsome untrod way, she had sped on until at last her goal was reached. Clambering up that wooded scaur of impracticable aspect, she checked her gallant horse, and gazed down on the scene which the lightning now illuminated.

There lay a narrow gorge, towered over on all sides by gaunt gray precipices, where but a stunted thicket here and there broke into the sterility. Far, far below, its belt of pasture was traversed by a brook, which speedily meandered back into the bosom of the mountain. Under the shelter of a vast impending rock, a rampart against missiles from above, dimly-discerned forms were lying prone at rest; and around, their horses grazed in the lulling of the storm. All this Fadette observed, and then addressed herself to the descent.

The tortuous way wound down from cliff to cliff, less perilous than it appeared above, and now she had nearly reached its foot. She turned a sudden promontory, and there, attracted by the sound of voices, and peering through the intertwining brush, she saw, a hundred feet below, a picket-guard of three or four, around a smouldering camp-fire. One man, apart, lay at full length, his face pressed downward on his folded arms that rested on the rain-soaked

sward,—in an attitude, it struck Fadette, of utter abandonment to despair. Another, lounging beneath a rock, was busied in splicing a bridle by the light of a torch held over his shoulder by a comrade reclining there above, and who, from his whistled medley of many tunes, presently rang out, clear and full and strong, a song which echoed back from crag to crag, while the other men took up the chorus. Fadette tarried, listening :

“ Up, comrades, up ! The moon’s in the west,
And we must be gone ere the dawn of the day :
The hounds of old Pennock shall find but the nest—
The Quantrell they seek shall be far, far away.

“ Though they scout thro’ the bush, though they scour the plain,
We’ll pass through their midst in the dead of the night ;
Their toil after us shall be ever in vain—
We are lions in combat, we’re eagles in flight.
Up, my brave band ! up, up, and away !—
Press hard on the foe ere the dawn of the day :
Look well to your steeds, so gallant in chase,
That they never give o’er till they win well the race.

Chorus—Up, comrades, up !

“ When Pennock is weary, the race given o’er,
We’ll come as a thunderbolt comes in the cloud—
We’ll traverse, we’ll rout, we will bathe in their gore,
We’ll smite the oppressor, we’ll humble the proud.
But few shall escape us, but few shall be spared,
For keen are our sabres, which vengeance has bared ;
And none are so strong, so mighty in fight,
As the warrior who strikes for the South and the Right.

Chorus—Up, comrades, up !

“ The bush is our home, the green sod our bed—
We drink from the river, and roots are our food :
We pine not for more, and we bow not the head,
For Freedom is ever within the green wood.

The foe shall not conquer, his fetters not bind,
For true are our rifles, our steeds like the wind:
We'll sheathe not the sword, we'll draw not the rein,
Till the invader be driven from Dixie again.

"Up, comrades, up! The moon's in the west,
And we must be gone ere the dawn of the day:
The hounds of old Pennoek shall find but the nest—
The Quantrell they seek shall be far, far away."

But, brave and stirring though the song, a strain to make her pulses bound to its bold refrain, Fadette heard little of it. Since she now realized that her errand was accomplished, and she herself in safety, thoughts hitherto overborne by excitement clamored for a hearing, and with deep though unseen blushes, she for the first time shrank from going forward among those men, and from meeting Ruthven Erle. She wondered, with a sudden sinking of her heart that had been beating so courageously, what he himself would think of this her ride—whether in it she had not ridden rough-shod over his standard of womanhood—whether Amy, his gentle little model, would ever have done likewise.

But, impatiently shaking off these misgivings, she was bending, gathering up the reins to urge her horse to greater speed, when there was a rustling in the bushes; a man sprang forward into the path before her; and in the almost outer dark, she felt her progress suddenly checked by a grasp upon the bridle, and she herself halted by a quietly spoken challenge.

For answer, she uttered a low cry of delight--

"Mr. Erle! Oh, Mr. Erle!"

"You here! Merciful God! You!"

In the sharp agony of his accents, she understood he believed only some great calamity could have brought her to him; thus she hastened to say that nothing was amiss at

home. There she faltered. But immediately forcing herself into courage, knowing from his silence that he was waiting for her, she resumed :

"I have learned that you are all in great and imminent danger—there was but this one way to warn you—and—and—I hope you do not think I have done wrong in thus—But no, I don't care—I know I am right!" she ended, defiantly.

Another rustling—this time in the thicket overhanging. So slight, it might have seemed the wind alone. No one heard it. Fadette looked down as the moon broke faintly forth once more. Ruthven had loosed the bridle and was standing at her side. A yearning love unconquerable deepened his eyes. And when he stretched forth his arms to lift her from the saddle, he held her closely to his breast one moment before he released. The downcast dewy lashes swept her burning blushes, an unconscious sigh of happiness just quivered on her lips. No word was spoken of that which was swaying both their souls—no word, and not another glance or touch was given, while they believed themselves alone, and accountable to their own conscience only.

But, with more baleful fury than the now spent lightning-glare, dark eyes were flashing on them from the thicket there above.

Fadette, overworn, and too weary both in mind and body for a struggle, would hardly in that hour have thought on bond or pledge, had Ruthven urged his love with but one word. And Ruthven, looking on her, knew that well. It smote him with another and a bitterer pang, as he leaned in silence against the tree beside the rocky seat on which she had sunk down.

"You are cold and wet," he said, concernedly. "Will you not let me take you to the camp-fire below? We keep

it in a smouldering state, but yet it is a fire, and can be quickly kindled to a blaze. There you shall unfold your tidings to the captain and to me alone."

She roused herself with an effort.

"No, no," she replied hastily. "I have been too long exposed for any camp-fire to do me good. I must tell my story, and so off again, trusting implicitly in exercise to keep off cold. My aunt and Matoaca know nothing of this escapade, and I must be safe at home before they are awake."

Mr. Erle listened attentively to Fadette's account, and agreed with her as to the importance of the information. His comrades would, he said, of course leave camp, and be many miles away to join the Confederate army—they were all recruits—before a *cordon bleu* could possibly encompass them. Fadette had done wisely as heroically, in not charging her idiot friend or his unknown employer with the power over so many lives. He too was unable to solve the mystery, and thought her rash in destroying the warning lines, which perhaps haste had confounded with the writing of her oaken ally. But her tale was of such import that he would at once acquaint the captain with it, and then accompany her home, as she said the coast was clear. He must have returned at daylight for those papers which, she explained, she had hesitated to risk in her uncertain ride.

Fadette lost sight of him in the descent, but presently saw him approach the group below, and bending over the man outstretched upon the grass, apparently speak to him aside. The other rose up, slowly and listlessly she thought, and both withdrew to a distance, remaining together some moments, while the stranger's manner changed, and his gestures, as Fadette conjectured designating routes to be pursued, were eager and interested. Then Ruthven

parted from him with a cordial hand-clasp, and very soon was once more with Fadette.

"Ah, you are looking at my *pro tem.* chief," he said, for she had not yet moved from her post of observation. "And, poor fellow, he has need of all womanly compassion. His is the history of hundreds of our bushwhackers—men who by some dire deed of tyranny have been driven to take retribution into their own hands, and, striking for the cause of freedom, will rather remain in a position to count every blow. There is a reminiscence of old heroic heathendom in thus sacrificing to the manes of their dead. Those who have not suffered with them, perhaps can see with you and me that our country's foe is not hydra-headed, but wields the lives in his command as weapons, and that as weapons we should be content to strike them from his hand. Our friend down there cannot feel this, with the sword thrust in his heart—with the remembrance of his gray-haired father hung on his own threshold—with the late knowledge of his frail young wife at last dead in a rigorous prison. But the brave men you have rescued could never be in trustier hands. Our true-blue friends may reserve their hempen cravats, as they will not fit these necks to-morrow. Hey presto! we are all vanished, by the magic of one little Fadette, as she well calls herself. And now for a gallop, since that perilous gorge is fairly left behind, and the moon again lends light upon the safer level."

No hoofs sounded behind in the rapid homeward ride. But along another and more circuitous route there was a headlong race. And when Fadette and Mr. Erle drew bridle at the skirt of woodland, lest the near trampling of hoofs should alarm the household, the hunchback stood to meet them there.

He advanced close to Fadette, as she still sat upon her

horse, and she put forth her hand to steady herself by his shoulder, while she should spring to the ground. But Ruthven Erle, his brows slightly contracted, anticipated her by laying a light hold on either shoulder of the intruder, wheeling him unceremoniously, yet gently, out of the way, and himself rendering the assistance required.

She looked up at him somewhat reproachfully when she had accepted it.

"Even my Leo would not have liked to be thus thrust aside and superseded," she said, in a low tone.

"And in this our hour of parting," he rejoined, bitterly, "you would repel from me such service as you would willingly receive from your dog or from your 'innocent.'"

"Now you know you are unjust. But I have sometimes believed that poor creature loved me even more intelligently than Leo. And by the way, where can Leo be? I thought he must have followed you, since he has not been seen since yesterday morning."

This was added as, putting her arm through the bridle of the horse she had ridden, she now walked onward toward the garden-gate before the house. But the hunchback, who the while had remained motionless where Ruthven Erle had placed him, furtively watching the two who began to move on together, suddenly followed, and touched a fold of Fadette's dress. She turned, and saw that by his uncouth signs and gestures he was striving to induce her to go no further, but rather to return to the covert of the wood.

She smiled upon him, yet shook her head. But when he still persisted, and caught at the bridle in her hand, she drew it from him in some annoyance.

"He is so strange this morning," she said, appealing to Mr. Erle. "And last night he acted in the same manner. It is so vexations!"

Ruthven stopped at her words, with the intention of putting an end to conduct which disturbed her. But the impediment was now directly in his own path, renewing the same signs, though this time with less of entreaty than command.

Ruthven instantly collared him and swung him aside roughly.

"You have humored him until he is unbearable," he said, in hot anger, striding on without further notice of Fadette.

In truth, the object upon which his anger thus was wreaked, had very little to do with its cause. The strict self-rule Fadette had reassumed, so like to cold indifference, was as a rankling arrow in his wounded soul, on which the heavy blow of this last parting was ready to fall. For he had resolved during that long and almost silent ride, that this should be the final farewell—that his aunt's affairs being once more arranged, as he yet saw a way to do, he would never again enter under her roof until Fadette was there no longer. His presence, he said within himself, brought back to her a passing feeling, a phantom from the past, he dared not wish should linger. Not for an instant did he believe that the emotion he had seen was but the shadow of a fast-abiding love, pent up from sight. Two days ago, when he had met her first upon the prairie's edge, she was so blooming and so bright, he could not see how that unhappy shade had overcast the whole horizon.

They walked on silently together in the fair sweet light of dawn. He never glanced down on her, nor she upward to his face. For her tears were yet welling beneath the down-dropped lids, and she was striving still to drive them back to their surging source.

The hunchback, thrust in scorn from out her path and his, stood looking on them both. At the first, a fury

of hatred and revenge had flashed forth from his overshadowed eyes, and with clenched hand he had made one quick step forward. Now, however, he stopped short, although the sinister gleam burnt ever more and more fiercely, and more like the tiger's glare before he springs. There was a glitter of white teeth through the dense black beard, as he muttered, in tones that might have fitted to a curse:

"Fool! Fool, and blind! You *will*, then, give me my revenge!"

And he turned, and plunged again into the lingering dusk of the forest.

Meantime, those two had entered in the garden-gate, had wound through all those grassy walks where straggling roses flung their boughs across, and now paused on the portico.

Ruthven Erle held out his hand, as Fadette would have tapped at the door for entrance.

"Have you forgiven my hasty words?" he asked.

"Ah, Mr. Erle, the hasty words were nothing. The hasty action—that harmless, friendless, pitiable creature—"

How this trembling pity, this downcast, hesitating reproof, became the dewy lashes, and the delicately-curved red mouth! Only because he loosed his hold of the slender fingers, with their pleading, deprecating touch, he could put away the mad desire to press them to his lips, to breathe against their whiteness wild beseechings, the utterance of which would dishonor him and her.

"You will bring my papers to me here," he said, moving abruptly from her side.

"Oh, but surely you will not go away directly? You will stay for a cup of coffee before the ride you have to take? There is no danger, surely! You consent? Then I run away to call my aunt and Matoaca; and, by-the-by,

I will gain admittance more readily in Mammy's own precincts, of course."

She flitted gayly round the house, forgetting the fatiguing, sleepless, stormy night, in the flush and triumph of success.

The servant was on the watch for her, and, indeed, acknowledged that her watch was not unshared. For she had been so "disturbed" by her young lady's proceeding, that she had confided all to Miss Matoaca, who had been walking up and down her room all night, pale as a ghost Mammy had once seen trailing all in white among the cotton-bolls one morning long ago at sun-up, when—

But Fadette cut short the seer with an order for breakfast, and went up to her room. Upon the stairs she met Matoaca descending, and felt herself taken into a long, close, silent embrace.

She stood where she was released, looking down upon her friend, a strange pang in her heart, and that glorious

"beauty hurting like the light
Let suddenly on sick eyelids."

And, holding by the baluster, she almost groped her dizzy, weary way up to her chamber, listening involuntarily for Matoaca's voice that greeted Ruthven Erle.

Her toilet finished, with strong disapproval she surveyed her pale face in the glass, then tried to brighten it by a rose-ribbon at the throat, which again she tossed disdainfully aside. She had reached the door, when she remembered she had not knelt for evening or for morning prayer, though many a terrified cry had gone up from her heart through that wild gallop in the night. So she sank upon her knees before the open window, as her wont was—the window at which she had kept that fearful vigil not so many hours ago.

Her glance roved over the scene before her, ere she folded her hands in prayer. The freshness of the dawning was on all. Through the faint gray shades and fleecy clouds there hovered rosy flushes, like the touches of a blessing seraph-hand; and as if that hand had left unbarred the celestial gates, through which poured a glory in the east, a breath so pure, so elevating, fluttered there without. It rustled downward in the lindens, shook out dews and fragrance from the roses, died away, then came again in fuller sweep across the prairie's deepening gold. She listened. The whispering quiver of the leaves; the twitter of the birds just waking in their nests; the far-off surge of deep, ripe prairie-grasses. Yet another sound—of flying hoof-beats, far and farther, ever farther in the distance.

That distance was too great to betray the rider in his uniform of blue. Fadette had not beheld him creeping stealthily from his post in the memorable barn-loft, which at the foot of the lawn commanded a view of the house. Had she beheld, how much that glimpse might have made clear! Thought might have reverted to last night's watch, and found an explanation of the hunchback's furtive approach, of his deterring when she would have crossed the lawn. And his mysterious demeanor on the forest's edge this morning—must she not have discerned method in that?

On that one glimpse hung all the future. And the spy, unseen, rode at full gallop to his camp.

Nevertheless,

“As at the tramp of a horse's hoof on the turf of the prairie,
Far in advance are closed the leaves of the shrinking mimosa,
So at the hoof-beats of fate, with sad forebodings of evil,
Shrinks and closes the heart, ere the stroke of doom has attained it.”

And it regained firmness only when she had lifted it to the temple-dome above.

When Fadette entered the dining-room, it was with the noiseless gliding step peculiar to her, and she observed no one within. Pausing by the small round table set for the two who had need of a hurried breakfast, she busied herself in arranging the vase of roses she had gathered, that the eye at least might be satisfied, if the palate should find the morning's meal a meagre one.

She had bent her head to inhale one last deep breath of fragrance, before going her way to hasten or perhaps assist in breakfast. Just then low tones reached her ear. She started, and advanced a step, thus gaining a view of the bow-window opening on the lawn. There stood Matoaca and Ruthven Erle—he looking down upon her with a proud and well-pleased smile of triumph, she blushing, timid, shrinking, and confused, as Fadette could never have dreamed of seeing the stately self-possessed Miss Vaughan. The beautiful lips were quivering forth two or three incoherent words, so subduedly that they failed to reach Fadette, when Ruthven suddenly raised to his lips the hand just laid on his—that slender delicate white hand, of curves so firm and clear, whose light unlingering touch seemed right royally to honor, and where Fadette's admiring glance had often been bestowed, to the utter scorning of the childlike dimples and proportions of her own.

But Ruthven Erle was thinking of that tiniest hand's frank childlike yielding, which though it always so soon flitted from his clasp, was wont to hover over trivial things—a flower, or—yes, even a pretty ribbon or a trinket—with a sense of pleasure in the contact. The one was formed imperially to guide, uphold, and warn—perhaps, at sorest need, to comfort: the other, to guide and to uphold by the shy reminder of its own dependence, by the beating of its pulses high and fast and bravely for the

right, and to bring comfort in its own soft nestling seeking for it.

But while Ruthven Erle was thus comparing, Fadette, in no soft mood, with flashing eyes and crimson scornful lips, had drawn back in the intent to leave the room as unobserved as she had entered. Unfortunately for her desire, however, she stayed first to place the vase in the centre of the table, and, unsteady with anger, she set it down, not lightly as she would have wished, but with a clear ring of the bright Bohemian resounding through the still apartment.

Her impulse was precipitate retreat. But there was a movement in the bow-window, and she resolved to stand her ground. When Mr. Erle came forward, she met him with a casual greeting, as if she had that moment entered. A rustling through that window opening to the piazza, and a light firm tread without, advised her that Matoaca was gone.

She was far too indignant to feel embarrassment. While she seated herself, idly toying with the flowers, a hot rebellion flushed her drooping face, as one furtive glance beheld his resting on her, with a glow of pleasure in the resting. So, she scoffed, he had but now looked on Matoaca—so he once had looked on Amy—and ah, the old, old rhyme:

“The moon looks
On many brooks.”

But here at least the tale shall vary—here is one brook that will still refuse that upward gazing at the moon. Better deep dark shadows over all her course, than that uncertain radiance.

In unison with this decision, she remained in seeming oblivion of his presence. He waited in silence, until, her

anger waxing somewhat fainter, embarrassment asserted itself, and she roused her spirits to banish it.

“‘Under which king, Lancaster or York,’ are you, Mr. Erle?” she cried gayly, singling out a white and a crimson blossom, and laying them before him.

He at once caught her allusion to that first evening of their meeting in Charleston, so nearly a *rencontre vi et armis*. And he smiled and took both flowers, fastening them in the cord of black and gold around his hat.

“*Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*,” he said, touching first the red and then the white. “National colors, were there but another red, in sign that courage is van and rear-guard of innocence.”

She pushed the vase toward him, and said carelessly, seeming not to notice that the flowers remained undisturbed:

“How very prudent to show your colors thus! You are right—in these irreverent times even the White Plume of Navarre might pass for a mere white feather, if not duly labelled. And labelled U. S. A., according to the Northern papers. They put us down in a wofully demoralized plight. I was much shocked the other day to read that before Atlanta a doughty gunner with this brand had, with one grim *coup d’œil* and a single wave of feathery smoke, routed a whole victorious brigade! Do we emulate such deeds in battle and in print?

“‘*Iliacos intra muros peccatur et extra.*’” Fadette put up her hands deprecatingly—“‘Not understand?’ I am fortunate, then, for you never would concede courage—or, for the rhyme’s sake,

‘Nul n’aura de l’esprit
Hors nous et nos amis.’

And, indeed, quite setting aside your faith in Southern papers

and 'the chivalry,' it is in the natural order of things that the one should be more truthful, as the other more daring, striking for all they hold most dear, and forming an army whose mainstay is patriotism, since they have little of the staff of life to lean upon. For the crowning triumph of such troops I would not know one fear, were it not that, unpaid, or paid in currency that sinks in value, they can do little or nothing for their women and children; and it is the enemy's wise policy to leave a wilderness behind in his march. For us, we have so long been used to arm, and clothe, and feed our columns from the northern commissariat, that our ragged, barefooted boys have been looking forward to this Missouri expedition, much as you might anticipate a day of shopping in St. Louis."

"Still so severed from beyond the Mississippi?"

"Still. Last winter a regiment of Louisiana cavalry was ordered into Chicot to cross arms, which they accomplished by night in flats and dug-outs, boxes, planks—paddling over on every available thing which might be hoped to float. A wary gunboat shelled from a respectful distance, but the bitterly cold weather, such as has not been known there for twenty years, was a greater foe. The spray froze upon the men's hands as they rowed, and more than one poor fellow was lifted on shore almost insensible."

"So the tide of war has drifted Chicotward," Fadette commented.

"A somewhat stronger tide than that which bore those arms across. What, have you then not heard of Chicot's great battle? Is it to go down to the future unknown? Had it been Tecumseh Landing, where brave Shelbyites cut off to a man their number of marauding Corps d'Afrique, and won the sword of a Colonel Cocke, who crew much like a craven—that, indeed, I might have borne. But a battle in which I trusted I myself had won some laurels—

that shall be historical! Are you ignorant that Ditch Bayou, against which you were wont to declaim as an interruption to the county, served as an interruption to Gen. A. J. Smith, and—”

“Stay!” cried Fadette; “I understand it now. It is the battle of “Dutch” Bayou, where A. J. Smith drove you flying to the canebrake. You, whose forces so outnumbered his, that it was believed at first Magruder had led all headquarters there. You, who lost in killed and wounded many more than Smith’s three hundred, and of whom so many prisoners were captured in Lake Village.”

Ruthven laughed.

“Have faith in the three hundred,” he replied. “That number tallies with the accounts of one of their own surgeons, and of our spies. But, for our part, take our own testimony; seven was the number of our slain. You are surprised at the disparity? Had we lost three hundred, there would have been a handful, indeed, to drive into the canebrake. But we were admirably posted on the higher bank of the bayou, toward the village; the enemy being forced to charge up the steep, while our guns—their own, which we had captured a month or two before—poured a raking fire on the ranks swept forward line by line to meet us. We held our position from morning until evening, unshaken. And when we did retreat, having delayed Gen. Smith during thirty-six hours, we drew back slowly, skirmishing still, along those five miles to the village, and thence a short distance to the rear, while the enemy did not attempt pursuit beyond the village. Our train—of blue, and marked U. S.—was driven leisurely from danger. Our general and staff, in this headlong canebrake flight, having been in the front of the battle, now rode on slowly in the rear, staying to wave farewell to a bevy of damsels, who, too excited for alarm, still lingered on the gallery, though the

blue-coats were in full view, and in another second a warning bullet struck a tree near by. Miss Charlie Goodfellow—you will readily believe she was the last who stood upon that gallery—had numbered at her watch over five thousand soldiers, when she was cut short by the entrance of a squad to pillage. She is convinced there were several thousand remaining unnoted."

"And what became of you?"

"It might have been said that Chicot

'Saw another sight
When the drums beat at dead of night,'

but that the rainy day was followed by darkness impenetrable. Our guides lost the way, and we did not emerge from our canebrake until morning, when our skirmishers followed Smith's forces to the river, making some captures, and we returned in quiet to our former camp. But Smith left his sign-manual on the dismantled houses of the village, and on the ashes of Columbia, near which he re-entered his boats. And now what think you of the Battle of Lake Chicot?"

Fadette's lips parted to give expression to the warm interest she had been feeling. But the remembrance of the moon and the brooks came first. And she said indifferently—

"Oh, the Thermopylæ of the West, of course. And you were the Leonidas."

And she was still refusing to look up, both figuratively and literally, he standing before her, listening to her careless speech, when Mrs. Rutledge entered, followed by the old servant with a breakfast-waiter. Mrs. Rutledge had already seen her nephew, so in silence still she advanced behind Fadette's chair. The young girl was first made aware of her presence by a hand that softly and lingeringly

smoothed back the dusky braids. As it stayed, Fadette's stole up too, with a timid fluttering touch. Tears of grateful joy rushed to her eyes, not falling, only shining there. And the aunt passed on to her place at the head of the table, smiling on Ruthven Erle, in a way that entered boldly into his confidence, while it approved and encouraged. His thoughts went back on the instant to that first winter in Charleston and at Beauregard. Then she had viewed coldly and doubtfully his every attention to the young stranger. Her smile now but deepened the gloom that brooded in his eyes. He received in silence his cup of fragrant coffee, and the low-toned remark with it, which Mammy ventured in this unceremonious breakfast to communicate with a profound courtesy—that though Mars' Ruthven might remember he used to like her coffee, yet it was no showing to Missie's there—only, poor little lamb, she was too tired out to make it this morning.

Lamb! and coffee-maker! it was no wonder Ruthven Erle looked up quickly with that quizzical expression lurking about his mouth. And when Matoaca, leading in the two children, who, both fair and fresh and blooming, dressed alike in white, might readily have appeared, as they called each other, sisters—when she added a panegyric upon Fadette's genius for light-bread and for butter, for vegetable-gardening, and—and—Fadette cut short the catalogue, with a merry laugh, in which her troubles vanished for the time.

“Now, Mammy, the omelette—‘solid pudding against empty praise’—you will find it a wise exchange, Mr. Erle. What is it, little Maisie? Sugar? There, see what a great piece fast in each wee fist! But tell me, Matoaca, did not one of your ‘ands’ represent the broom? What a mercy you were not here last week, Mr. Erle, when on an emergency I undertook to institute a sweeping-day! Pip's

sister 'on the rampage' resolved to 'sweep all obnoxious intruders away,' is but a mild rendering of that experience."

"And oh, Cousin Ru'," cried Janet, in her childish eagerness to unfold all the wonders of the past, "we were all so hungry once—so hungry!—only our cousin would not let us tell mamma. But cousin did not get hungry herself—wasn't that strange?"

"Yes, indeed," the cousin interrupted gayly, while the color mounted to her brow, "we were once actually at starvation point—almost reduced to that dire extremity which Masie's great song relates,"

The child, leaning against Fadette, glanced round at these words, and with a merry expression on her bright little rose-bud face, defiant of "sister Janet's" growing indignation, half sang, half chanted, in the wild monotony of a negro air, taught by Mammy herself:

"Mammy done kill me,
Birdie done eat me.
Poor little sister sitting un' table,
Pecking my bo—ones—
Pecking my bo—ones."

Fadette glanced at Ruthven Erle, and the association with this last word struck them simultaneously. Their laughter was explained by an allusion to the Knight of the Spur, and the Sol of Chivalry.

But Ruthven's smile soon passed away.

"A brave man," he said.

"A very valiant trencherman,' as I remember," laughed Fadette.

But Ruthven returned, gravely:

"Within him, what all that's without him belies,

The fool that last year at her Majesty's ball
Sickened me so with his simper of pride,
Is the hero now heard of, the first on the wall,
With the bayonet wound in his side.' "

"What, you do not mean in truth, Mr. Erle?"

"He fell, Miss Matoaca, in the battle of Jenkins' Ferry. A year ago, he found his weary way home from the trenches of Petersburg, discharged as unfit for duty, and to all appearance dying from a wound in the lungs. Charley's devoted nursing prolonged his life from month to month, and when Steele marched toward Camden last April, Goodfellow was so far recovered, that he immediately announced his resolve to volunteer under Price. To his sister's faint dissuasion, he replied that his course was well-nigh run out now, and since she must mourn him, he had rather she mourned him buried on the field of honor. So he joined our own gallant First Brigade, after due deliberation as to where his services and military knowledge would be most beneficial. It was, perhaps, scarcely complimentary to our ability to stand alone, that he at length selected us—albeit he stated; as his reason for so doing, that under our general he could not fail to see fight."

"And he was killed, poor fellow!" Fadette said, softly.

"He was killed. Just when the tide of battle wavered—just before the final hour which left us masters of a glorious field—while yet we waded painfully through blood-stained mire, nor stood firmly on the road to victory. He fell at my side, waving the flag caught up from a wounded color-bearer, shouting a cheer which our gallant fellows rang back. I bent above him as the fight swept by. The hue of death and its rigidity were on his face, and it was with failing breath he gasped: 'The flag! the flag!—yes, take it—But if I might but have borne it to the end—might but have led this charge—secured the victory—and then—'

It was over. Those were the words of a commander whose eye could nerve a legion, whose right arm control it. They were spoken by an obscure private, uncouth, uninfluential, vain—unconscious butt of all his comrades. But, begun in death and ended in a prayer in Paradise—gasped out to the plashing of the life-blood—they sounded in my ear sublime self-dedication, and sealed a martyr-testimony to the cause.”

Fadette had bowed her brow upon her hand to hide the tears that slowly fell.

“And Charley?” said Matoaca, her dark eyes beautiful with light.

“Charley came to the grave of her brother, whom his comrades had laid reverently at the foot of a great oak, where the gray moss trailed over a rude cross on which were cut the words, ‘The flag—if I might but have borne it to the end!’” Charley knelt there for a space, and laid her cheek against those letters, her eyes uplifted with a strange intensity of gaze. And then she rose and grasped my hand one instant, turned and rode away toward home again, speechless and tearless, her color burning high.”

“And the poor father?” Matoaca asked again.

It was some moments before Mr. Erle replied, and then only on Miss Vaughan’s reiteration of her question.

“That hospitable, cheerful home is altogether desolate. Had the elder brother not died thus in battle, he must have perished far more fearfully. A raid of white and negro troops went out upon the bayou some weeks after, and when they had returned again to their boats, a neighbor passing by our friend’s plantation saw the house in flames, and on approaching, at the gate there lay a charred and blackened corpse, the heart torn out and smouldering in the ashes that shrouded the body. Near by, lay the mutilated boy, and beside her dead crouched Charley,

hardly living more than they. She never left them till they were laid together in the last resting-place, and then she suffered herself to be led away by a neighbor, at whose house she retired quietly to rest. But the next morning she was gone, and all search for her has since proved unavailing. There can be no doubt, since her valuables and money, of which she had no little, also disappeared, that she had simply resolved to leave a vicinage so dread with memories. I am perfectly satisfied she is still laboring for the cause in some far-off retreat. The last her kind friend saw of her that night, she was kneeling calmly at her prayers."

There was a long pause. Mr. Erle had told his tale reluctantly, continuing only at Miss Vaughan's urgent sign in every pause, and at Mrs. Rutledge's earnest "Go on, Ruthven." And now Mrs. Rutledge had passed out on the piazza, ostensibly to watch the children at play upon the lawn, and Matoaca sat there so pale and still, he could not but believe, as he had feared, that her thoughts had gone back to that ghastly night at Sleepy Hollow. He regarded Fadette anxiously. Her tear-stained face was partly shaded from him. She made a strong effort to throw off her depression, questioning cheerfully of friends he had already casually mentioned. Then Matoaca drifted into the conversation again.

"Ruthven," Mrs. Rutledge said, re-entering, "will you not, on your return to Arkansas, be again at Camden?"

"I do not doubt it. If not ordered to headquarters, will probably be able to obtain a short furlough. So any word, my dear aunt, you have for our little Amy, shall speedily and safely be delivered."

"I cannot send messages of love to my own child," she answered slowly; "but tell her how well her father bears his prison-life—how I am enabled to keep privation from

him—how constantly I am with him, thanks to my sweet little housekeeper here—and that at last I have good hope of his release. And, my dear boy,” she added hurriedly, as he rose and buckled on his pistol-belt, “do not be rash and reckless—remember to how many is your life most precious.”

She laid a trembling touch upon his shoulder. But he did not look at her paling face, he did not look at Matoaca, whose tears were falling fast. He only saw Fadette, who, because she could not stay the quivering of her wrist, had laid down on the table the packet of papers for which he was holding out his hand, and who dropped hers clenched at her side in the folds of her dress. The knowledge of his observation brought the color to her cheek, and she manifested so little of that regret which, vain as it would have been, he still could not but yearn for, that he turned away with a smothered sigh, and took up his papers.

“I have a considerable sum of money to deposit for you,” he was saying to Mrs. Rutledge—“and, as I am not obliged to rejoin my command for some days yet, I shall have occasion, while still upon recruiting duty, to place it in the same hands which—”

A shrill childish scream broke in upon his words. The two little girls came flying into the room from their play upon the lawn.

“Oh, Mamma, Mamma, soldiers!” shrieked Janet.

And Maisie, in the contagion of terror, though scarcely comprehending, fled sobbing to Matoaca.

The ladies started forward, while Mr. Erle, drawing a pistol from his belt, quietly demanded where.

“Right at the gate, Mars’ Ruthven—a mighty heap on ’em,” replied the old servant, who now rushed in, well-nigh blanched with fear.

“Oh, Mr. Erle, come, come—” Fadette began eagerly.

"It is too late," Mrs. Rutledge said, moving from the window—"They are here, Ruthven—the house seems surrounded. What can be done?"

Already, as she was speaking, he had closed and locked the door. And now he drew in and bolted the shutters of one window, while Fadette and Matoaca sprang to the others, leaving thus but one means of ingress—the bow-window opening on the piazza.

"Leave me now," he said. "Of course there is no escape for me, but I must at all hazards destroy these papers before surrendering. Leave me—do not remain near, for I may be forced to defend myself, and cannot, you at hand."

Matoaca stood irresolute. Mrs. Rutledge, deathly pallid, shook her head and clasped his arm as if determined not to go. But he with gentle authority loosed her hold, and led her to the door, then moved to let Matoaca pass out. As Fadette, white and quivering, followed without looking up, he extended his hand. Hers trembled in his grasp, as her voice, faltering

"Ah, let me stay!"

"I cannot."

And she too was gone.

Hardly an instant, when armed men surrounded the window. An officer advanced and called upon him to surrender.

Ruthven Erle came forward, coolly and calmly, pistol in hand.

"Sir," he said, "in ten minutes I surrender, provided you grant me that space of time, while no one enters this room. Surround it as you will—there is no escape, and I pledge my honor to attempt none. But try to take me by force, and I am a desperate man. I have the advantage of you in this shelter, I am armed with two six-shooters, and I

seldom miss my aim. See—" and raising his arm with apparent carelessness, a sharp report followed, and a swallow twittering downward toward an oak across the lawn, fell in one death-flutter to the ground.

The men retreated a few paces involuntarily. The glances which had followed the bird's fate, were now all turned on him. Some two or three would have pressed forward, but their captain hesitated, and gave no word of command. And, quite setting aside all possible motives of the prisoner, it seemed a lavishness of courage, to risk half a score of lives for a matter of as many moments. Such a murmur rose along the foremost file, and the officer drew apart with several of his men in consultation.

That Ruthven Erle's undaunted demeanor, the cool, keen, steady resolution in his fearless eyes, promoted that murmur equally with his ready shot, is undeniable. He was standing meanwhile in the entrance-way, with folded arms, yet warily watching his besiegers' every movement.

The council of war resulted presently in the dispersal of half the soldiers to guard the door and the other windows, while a squad of fifteen or twenty yet remained investing this one.

As soon as this change was made, Erle withdrew from view, and began his task. Several passages in his papers he deliberately read over, to impress them further on his memory, and then he tore them one and all in fragments so small, that a match hastily struck and catching here and there soon made them undistinguishable. And before the stipulated moments had elapsed, he appeared once more upon the threshold.

"With these," he said, quietly delivering his weapons to the officer, "with these I should have attempted escape, had it not been for papers which must have fallen into your power, had you killed me. Take the pistols—they have

seen some service since they were borrowed from you at Manassas."

But the prisoner was not to be marched off without a farewell word.

Mrs. Rutledge and Matoaca pressed forward through the guard, the latter weeping silently, the other sternly self-controlled, though her lips but quivered when she would have spoken.

Another glided noiselessly from the recess in the wall beside the bow-window, where all this while she had crouched, breathless, like a frightened deer in covert.

No one saw her at the first, and she listened for her own name. But he was going without a thought of or for her. He was speaking to Matoaca. And now— But she must, she would have the last word. Only, he should not think she cared—not she ! So she pressed her palms vehemently on her white cheeks, to force a ray of color there, and smoothed the line of trouble from her brow. And then she advanced, and said in an unshaken voice how sorry she was—how she hoped and trusted he would ere long be exchanged.

He checked the "scarcely possible" in the utterance, and half questioned instead :

"You will, however, sometimes send a thought even to the prison?"

The smile that curled her lips was very far from her eyes, and the light tone in which she answered him had more of forced flippancy than gayety :

"Need you ask ? When I am quarrelsome, shall I not wish for you, as of old, to quarrel with ? when I am sad, to make merry with ? Shall not the name of dancing recall the champion of the doughty spur—and—"

"Every breakfast-table, batter-cake strategy," he interposed, smiling perhaps somewhat bitterly, as he once more

shook hands with her. And exchanging another hasty farewell with Mrs. Rutledge, he was marched off without the garden-gate, where the horses were secured.

But his captors had no idea of resting content with one Confederate, trophy of war. With the exception of the guard, all were speedily in the house. For sacking was the order of the day.

Before the lower story had been ransacked, Fadette flew up stairs to her aunt's chamber, remembering a certain purse of gold which Mrs. Rutledge had probably not had time to secure. This she concealed about her. And after making a hasty tour through the apartments, hiding what could be hidden on the spur of the moment, she went down again.

"Confusion worse confounded." Carpets cut, and strewn with the combined contents of the store-room—piano shattered—furniture broken. Men carrying meat dripping with blood through the hall, and there on the piazza, tied to a column, a calf, quartered alive, was struggling and moaning out the death-throe as Fadette passed by.

Sickened with the sight and the stifling atmosphere, she hurried on. Plunder, plunder, everywhere. Mrs. Rutledge, with Janet clinging fast to her dress, and Matoaca with Maisie in her arms, were making almost vain efforts to save something.

"Miss Janet, Miss Janet!" now screamed old Mammy, leaning over the balusters up stairs, "some—gentlemen—here, a-breaking open your great chest."

Fadette glanced into the library, and seeing her aunt engaged there, hastily ran up.

But the great chest was already broken open, and Mammy in despair.

"Oh," she whispered, drawing near to Fadette, "Mistis

told me she left her purse in her room, and sent me for it, but it's gone."

Fadette shook her head, and smiled.

A soldier standing unobserved without the doorway, saw the gesture, and took his clue from it.

"Look a-here, young woman," he said, roughly grasping Fadette's shoulder, "what have you been hiding? Because you had just as well out with it. You ain't going to get off without."

Fadette shook off his touch, and looked at him, the hot blood rushing to her face.

"What have I been hiding?" she said—"A great many things; but it seems they are being found fast enough. What will you have? Walk in and help yourself. All this is confiscated property."

"Never you fear but I'll help myself," the man rejoined. "Look a-here, Bill"—and he beckoned to a comrade, who had just finished cutting from its frame Mr. Rutledge's portrait, painted by a prison friend, and who now obeyed the summons, rolling up the canvas and bestowing it under his arm. "Bill, I've a notion," he continued, as that art-loving worthy came up—"that this here girl's got some money or jewelry, or what not, hid about her. Let's have it."

"Well, let's."

"Will you give it up pleasant, now?" the first said insinuatingly, as if nothing in the world could be more agreeable than such a request.

Fadette, amused at his cool impertinence, slightly smiled, replying—

"It is a thousand pities, Sir, that I cannot oblige you. My last dollar, and jewelry too, have but now disappeared from that bureau. You see, the drawers, or what once were drawers, are empty."

"Come now, that won't go down with us—better shell out, and no words—"

"But I assure you that is the truth."

"Lots of assurance," Bill suggested. "Come, shell out"—and he caught her dress.

Fadette with the strength of terror wrenched away, and fled toward the door. But the other man stepped between and slammed it, after summarily bestowing a kick and a curse upon the servant outside, who made a precipitate flight, screaming, to her mistress.

Meanwhile his fellow-ruffian had seized and flung Fadette violently upon the floor. And partly by her arm, partly with his grasp wound in her long black hair, which had fallen down in the struggle, he had dragged her across the room, before she could find voice to speak or to cry out,—he the while declaring, with awful oaths, that he would have the money—would get it himself, as she would not give it up.

"Let me go—let me go," she gasped faintly; "I'll give you all, all, if you will only let me go."

He released her. The two stood by, swearing frightfully, while she rose to her feet, trembling so that she could with difficulty draw the purse from its concealment. And flinging it to the further end of the room, with one bound she gained the stairway, and almost flung herself down into the hall, where her aunt and Matoaca, with one little inoffensive-looking soldier, were hastening to her assistance. She had rightly conjectured that the precious purse would not be left in order to pursue her.

Half an hour after, and the homeless group were standing on the lawn. Flames burst forth from windows, doors, and roof of the house, fired in every apartment. Volumes of smoke blackened the sunlight. The atmosphere grew so

oppressive that Mrs. Rutledge was moving off, when her little girl, leaving her hand, darted forward.

"Pussy, pussy !" she cried.

And the kitten, disconsolately mewing around her lost home, at the sound of that familiar voice approached, purring with delight. A soldier standing near, turned too. With one swoop of his bayonet, he transfixed the tiny creature, and held it howling over the flames.

"You bad man—you wicked, wicked man !" screamed the child, trembling with frantic grief. Then, as he tossed the animal in at the blazing window, and scowled at her, she fled to her mother's side, burying her face in her dress, and sobbing out—

"Take me away, take me away, Mamma. Let's go in a turkey-trot too—I am so afraid."

The mother clasped the poor child tenderly, and drew her away, with the desolate household, from the dense air of the burning buildings. For now barn and stable were on fire too.

Ruthven Erle was still at the gate, pacing restlessly to and fro before his guards, his arms secured behind him. He turned aside on seeing Mrs. Rutledge. But she advanced, and putting Janet down, laid both hands on his shoulders, forcing him to meet her.

"What is it, Ruthven, but a little money !" she said. "We will take refuge with a neighbor until we can arrange another home."

"Promise me," he said, "that it shall be where you are no longer subject to the incursions of these devils. I have brought this upon you."

"But you did your duty—you must not regret that."

He was silent, then resumed hurriedly: "That shriek from the house maddened me. I knocked down one of the

guard, and would have gone to your assistance, but they bound me, thus—" and he moved his fettered arms, clenching his teeth in furious anger.

"My poor boy!" she said soothingly.

Fadette had seldom seen her face so soften.

"Come, Sir." A soldier touched him on the shoulder. They were all mounting.

Mrs. Rutledge clung to him, speechless. Matoaca laid her hand upon his arm, whispering something, while her tears fell fast. Janet raised her rosy mouth, smiling in childish forgetfulness of recent tears.

And Fadette stood apart. He glanced at her, and said huskily—

"Have you, then, not even a farewell for me?"

All her pride, all her composure, broke down utterly. She came and stood before him, not daring to meet his eyes. He looked steadily into her downcast face. And then he bent, and touched her forehead with his lips.

She remained there as if turned to stone, while he too mounted. When the hoof-beats, muffled in the deep grass, grew more distant, she mechanically moved to follow her aunt.

Mrs. Rutledge and Matoaca did not hear her slow step on the lawn. They were speaking earnestly.

"Ruthven Erle is a fool—"

"Mrs. Rutledge!"

"I say he is a fool!" reiterated the elder lady still more angrily. "Is he not wasting his love, his whole life, on a girl who cares nothing for him—a flirt—a heartless—"

Fadette heard no more. She turned hurriedly away, among the shrubbery. Her aunt's words, or what Matoaca might say, had scarcely place one moment in her mind.

Benumbed and passionless, she sank upon the sward beneath the roses, her head bowed on her knee. She did

not think, she did not feel, she did not know how long a time had passed. When some one touched her shoulder.

With a violent start, she looked up. It was the hunchback. She rose, pressing her cold palm confusedly upon her forehead. The movement seemed to bring back to her memory all the changes of that day. Pushing aside the branches, she saw where Mrs. Rutledge, Matoaca, the servant, and even the children, were busied in packing together the few articles they had saved. The little ones' innocent laughter as they played at being useful, dragging to and fro some burden larger than themselves, grated on Fadette's ear, but roused her more effectually. And shelterless as they were, and distant from all neighbors, she remembered the hunchback's cave as a refuge for one night.

Its master accompanied the melancholy party thither. Silently he kindled a fire within, silently brought forward food and set before them. Markedly as he had always sought Fadette before, he now shrank from her. But the poor girl noted nothing of this. The haven reached, she had sunk down almost unconscious as before, deaf to all attempts of Mrs. Rutledge and Matoaca to rouse her, and unobservant that very soon the hunchback had left the cavern to its new inhabitants.





CHAPTER XXII.

THE HUNCHBACK.

"Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past."

LOTOS-EATERS.

THE stillness of deep slumber wrapped the cave. The long night had passed heavily away. Toward dawn the restless watchers, overworn, had withdrawn to the couch of shawls and blankets spread for them and the little ones by the faithful servant who had long since taken her place at its foot. Fadette alone remained beside the fire sunk to embers. And even she, exhausted by those sleepless nights and the past day's excitement, had fallen into a light doze, her head drooped back against the piled-up relics of Prairie-Combe, brought hither by old Dobbin and his sledge.

Between the rocky crevices above, the morning sun crept in, in straggling rays which did not waver toward the deep recesses of the cavern. So that still a hush and darkness, as of midnight, hung there. Only through the silence came a movement of the slumberers, whom sense of trouble yet kept restless; and an occasional low-drawn moaning from Fadette's pale lips. For through her dreams did Ruthven Erle, bound and dragged away, turn on her a reproachful glance.

She stirred and moaned again, when through the narrow entrance near, marked only by a line of deeper obscurity, there came a sound; at first it was indistinct, as of the grating of the boughs, then clear and clearer, of approaching footsteps.

The next instant, Ruthven Erle stood at her side.

He bent above the sleeping girl. Even as he bent, a painful quiver passed across her mouth, and she moved her head from side to side uneasily. Her lips parted with a murmur, and involuntarily he stooped lower yet to catch the wail:

"Oh, Ruthven, Ruthven, not one word? You cannot then forgive? And I—I—"

The rest was lost in incoherent sounds. His arm was stretched forth, as if he would have drawn her to him. A strange deep tenderness had softened all his face. But suddenly he lifted himself up, and crossed his arms upon his breast.

"My God! I cannot speak that word. My only love, I cannot claim you. I must let you go forever."

This suppressed mutter forced-itself through his stern-set lips. And the hunchback, who had guided him hither, lingering at the entrance, released his unconscious clutch upon a pistol hidden in his belt, and quietly advanced to the fire, with an armful of brushwood.

But his step roused Fadette. Her eyes opened full on Ruthven Erle, at first dreamily, anon in a wild incredulous stare. She raised herself slowly, still never removing her eyes, as if she strove to keep a vision that might vanish with a turn, as dreams are wont. And standing shivering from head to foot before him, she put her hand out wistfully.

He made her lean against him, for he saw this excitement was more than her over-taxed strength could bear,

and that she must have fallen unsupported. And she looked up to him, while the color slowly came into her face.

"No spirit, in good truth," he answered lightly to the astonished questioning of that glance. "'And have I frightened you? What, trembling still? Now, will you have the history of my escape?'"

For she had withdrawn herself, and resumed her seat before the fire. He took his upon the Prairie-Combe *débris* beside, and began, as she at length found voice to beg :

"Strange, is it not, that by means of friends of yours, I should twice have been delivered from imprisonment—this time probably from that narrower, darker prison-house, the grave. Yes, your innocent there"—the hunchback was at that moment on one knee before the fire, fronting the speakers, heaping up the boughs that blazed and crackled merrily away—"might seem to have had somewhat of the serpent's wisdom, or of that instinct and cunning which in such creatures fills, oftentimes amply enough, the place of wisdom."

• He lowered his voice, as the subject of his remarks, still bending there, folded his arms across his breast, his head dropped forward as if in meditation, while beneath the shelter of his slouched hat, his gaze seemed fixed upon the flames.

Fadette smiled.

"Nay, he hears as if he heard nothing," she said. "Frequently as he has been with me, he has never given sign of comprehension other than dear old Leo might. By the way, is it not strange that Leo has not been seen since that night you came to Prairie-Combe?"

"I saw Leo in the Federal camp, leashed against escape. Perhaps your hunchback had tracked him there—at all events, he came, and the two greatly amused the soldiers,

though neither quite entered into the amusement, Leo showing his white teeth, and your ally here a dangerous gleam in his eyes. I alone observed that, however. And after they had been made the sport of an hour, so amicable were the relations, that when the poor wretch crept near me, he was left to sleep there. I knew little slumber, but awaking from a doze in the dead of the night, felt something close against me, and in the dim light discerned my neighbor. As he caught my eye he began to gibber and to point, yet all in silence; and I watched and found he was engaged in cutting the cords that bound me. I raised myself upon my elbow, prepared for the knife's next onslaught on my throat, for your *protégé* has always seemed to bear me 'unco little luv.' Whether my observance disconcerted him, or he had not entertained such murderous design, be that as it may, he presently betook himself to rest. But no clear-scheming conspirator could more deftly have contrived my escape. The cords were severed so, that while the outside still appeared intact, one putting forth of my strength would leave me free, a very Samson. And when at earliest dawn this morning we were marshalled under marching-orders, and I, bound so apparently fast, was mounted between my guards, I suddenly snatched the carbine from my right-hand man, felled him to the ground, and was off before any one had recovered from the confusion sufficiently to pursue me: This poor creature had leaped upon the captain's horse which he was holding, and so after me. At the verge of the prairie, I halted and ordered him back threateningly, loth with such a companion to risk my safety in the precarious way before me. But I soon saw he was not thus to be driven away. I could not use violence to one who but now had saved me. There was no time to lose, for I heard the pursuers in the distance, though an opportune grove hid me. So I dashed at

once into these woods along the mountain-side. Soon I perceived he was bent upon leading the way. And reflecting that he was wont to linger near you, I determined to yield to his guidance, as my purpose was not to leave the vicinity without news of you.

"Leo, when I first looked back, I saw forcibly restrained from following. But so noble an animal is sure of kindly treatment, and beyond a doubt he will soon win his way to you. This evening I shall venture forth to spy out the country. If you can be content to wait here until then, as I have reason to believe my morning's hosts will be many miles away, I shall myself have the pleasure of escorting you with old Dobbin and the sledge, probably remaining unconfiscated, to your old friend Mr. Thorne's. He will see you at length settled in St. Louis, now perhaps safer than elsewhere. There, shall be another fund for your care, manager mine."

"Where have you fallen upon a gold mine, Fortunatus?"

"Fair Incredulity, in Texas, that land flowing with milk and money. You know that upon your leaving Beauregard I established all the Rutledge negroes upon a cotton-plantation in that State. Last year's crop was sold to Government for the Mexican trade in army supplies. Thus you have again that enough which is as good as a feast—of which, however, you must very carefully gather up the fragments, for Texas crops are proverbially uncertain, great droughts succeeding a year of plenty. However, there is every probability that your uncle will be released before your present funds run low."

"And how are the servants doing in Texas, Mr. Erle—Uncle Washington and the rest?"

"Washington has made his five hundred in gold. Negro patches outthrive the plantation fields; and as for their poultry-yard, its thousand or two voices call the morning

from such a distance, that I am satisfied the sun cannot but first present himself there. Still, they await anxiously the close of the war, to return to the old Carolina home. Not at all demoralized—their gunboat experience being very useful, and Washington's influence great."

"And Irene?"

"Still with Amy. Always inquiring for 'her own young mistis.'"

"Ah, Mr. Erle, is not Amy's lot a sad one?"

"But she is very hopeful, sees a happy peace never far off, and thinks this separation can be at most a few months longer."

"Ah! but I did not mean that, which time will remedy. But Mr. Weir's loss—"

"Surely you do not mean that could occasion real unhappiness?"

She blushed crimson under his surprised scrutiny.

"I do," she said courageously, though the long lashes drooped upon her cheek. "I cannot imagine mutilation so separated from pity, as perfect love must be. It seems reversing the order of things for a man to lean on a woman, though ever so little—"

"Then it is the clothing of the spirit, and not the spirit, which must have the strength you admire?"

"I am afraid I could not make the distinction," she said, ashamed of her feeling, yet too honest to disavow it. "And Mr. Weir, so pale and shattered, is scarcely the handsome dashing bridegroom I first saw. But I won't have you think me weaker than I am. If"—her voice shook a little in embarrassment—"if I—if Amy had been engaged, not married, and he had come to her mutilated—aye, even as fearfully deformed as my friend and Leo's there—I would have held her bound, and doubly bound, to keep her faith. And even if her love had been less than true

love is, I well believe her womanhood could find a sweetness in its self-devotion. But I think the love could hardly be the same."

"To know thyself is the true wisdom," Ruthven Erle ironically said, looking down with an amused expression on the fairy who thus declared for the thornless roses of this world, while she daily stooped to weed the briars from the path of others.

But upon another listener her speech fell differently.

"Leo's friend," still in the same position, had fixed a furtive gaze upon her as she spoke. His dark face darkened more and more at every word. Only once a passing gleam flashed over it, with a flush of crimson. And a hasty gesture escaped him, as if he would have reached forth a hand to her. She was saying, "I would have held her bound, and doubly bound, to keep her faith"—"a sweetness in its self-devotion."

But no one cared to cast one glance his way. Fadette had raised her eyes deprecatingly to Ruthven with a timid appeal to his indulgence. Ruthven met them with a long full gaze of tenderness. And the hunchback's arm fell heavily to his side. He moved apart, and took his station at the entrance.

Day was wearing on to evening, almost unvarying in the cavern. Ruthven Erle had been abroad to reconnoitre, and had reason to believe it hardly yet was safe to venture forth. The circle round the fire was cheerful enough, and the hunchback still kept watch apart.

Suddenly in the distance, faint and far, just creeping through the covert, came the baying of a dog. The hunchback alone heard. Stealthily and unperceived he left the cave, and passed on where the entrance opened to the twilight air. He listened. Aye, the baying still—and it was

Leo's, he distinguished plainly. But another sound was mingled with it. Near and nearer, up the rocks, and through the tangled underwood, there came the ringing fall of horses' hoofs—the clash of arms against the overhanging boughs across the way. Leo, faithful Leo, leading on the enemy to this last shelter.

The listener paused one moment, hesitating.

"A life for a life!" he muttered between his teeth. "It shall be so, since she—she loves him! Yet, Ó Fadette, if you but knew—"

The words were stifled with the thought. He thrust aside the bushes hastily, sprang down the crag, and flung himself from cliff to thicket, rock, and scaur, in headlong haste to meet the still approaching sound. A clear shrill whistle, and the dog had at a bound leaped on his friend, in frantic joy.

With one firm grasp upon the collar of the animal, he stood to meet the horsemen who dashed up.

"On the right track at last!" the foremost cried, with a ringing halloo to the comrades in his rear. "The dog has found his idiot master, and will quickly ferret out the camp itself. Out of the way there!" he shouted to the hunchback.

But the latter made no motion to give way. He merely raised his right hand, and removed the hat which he had heretofore so closely worn. The soldier halted and surveyed him curiously.

A broad white scar crossed the straight forehead, and seamed the right cheek to the dense black beard. The dark eyes fixed themselves upon the soldiers riding up, with a cool steadiness most strangely unlike the wavering of an idiot. He waited till the tumult knew an instant's lull, and every gaze was on him. Then he spoke in clear, deliberate tones:

"So! You stare in doubt upon each other. You are right—the idiot is gone. You look aghast. Do you remember how often, to make a mockery of him, you have dragged him to your camp, until he has heard your plans, and seen your strength and weakness? Many an ambush of the outlawed rebels he has decoyed you into. Many a shot among them he has had at you, and head and hands has been to them for months and months. But"—he added with a rapid change of tone, perceiving that the first pause of astonishment was giving way to fury, and that many a brow was threateningly knit, and many a grasp clenched vehemently upon sword and pistol—"but those whom I have served most faithfully heap on me a bitter wrong. At this moment full revenge is in my reach."

He stopped short, stifling back his agitation.

The men looked angrily upon him. But they only saw corroboration of his story in the darkly flushing brow, the laboring chest, the fierce outlook as of a hunted stag at bay. They were blind to the heroic honor which had sent him forth thus to stand between them and their unconscious prey. Stunned in the maddened conflict between baffled love and jealousy and vengeance, that honor had yet roused before it was too late.

He resumed more calmly:

"They have escaped you this once. But bring me to your captain, and I can, to fill my own revenge, enable you to wreak your own. I alone can track them to their lair. What, you distrust me? There—I am unarmed and in your power. You have sometimes followed blindly in my way. I put myself in yours."

With this, he laid his pistols on the ground, and stood defenceless there among them. His words were the words of a traitor. His eyes were filled with the glorious light of a martyr. The deed he spoke of, was a deed of shame.

His bearing had that proud nobility which checked the taunts upon his captors' lips, and for a moment inspired a respect oblivious of his deformity. And still he kept a detaining hold on Leo, who was now curbed to his control, and followed, when between his guards he was led down and so across the prairie, to the distant village where he might betray his comrades to the officer in command.

Under cover of that night, Ruthven Erle led to a friend's protecting roof the houseless wanderers from Prairie-Combe. And ere the dawn had broken, he rode safely on his way to join the northward-marching army under Price.





CHAPTER XXIII.

RANDOLPH HONOR.

“He leans upon his hand ; his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his drooped head sinks gradually low :
And through his side, the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower ; and now
The arena swims around him—”

CHILDE HAROLD.

AUNT JANET, I wish to speak to you a moment.”
Mrs. Rutledge looked up at these words, uttered
in a calm, cold, expressionless voice. She saw Fa-
dette standing in the doorway, the very embodiment of her
tone.

Matoaca’s work fell in her lap.

“Is any thing the matter?” she asked, anxiously.

Mrs. Rutledge rose from her packing, for it was the
second day since they had taken refuge with their friend,
and on the morrow they must leave for a new home in St.
Louis. And as she rose, Fadette, as though she had heard
nothing, led the way from the room without reply.

At first she had turned toward her own chamber, but with
instinctive longing for fresh air, she passed out upon the
piazza, and speechlessly extended to her aunt an open letter
which she had held concealed in the folds of her dress.
Mrs. Rutledge straightened it out slowly, with undefined
apprehension, and read :

“I do not know, Fadette, if in writing to you now, I am

most selfish or most generous. Certain it is, that when my prison-keepers granted my request, and gave me pen and paper, only a wild thirst for revenge, a will that you yourself should know some measure of my wretchedness, was in my mind. For, Fadette, through all my doubt of you, and all my anger, and through all the unwitting tortures you have heaped upon me, I have never doubted that, should sorrow touch me nearly, it would bring a pang to you. This is my revenge. But will you not too surely count it for generosity, that I here release you from all promise made to me? Whether I could ever have resolved to do so—whether I could with my free-will have foregone all hope in life, I cannot tell. But death resolves for me. I am a prisoner, and not only a prisoner, but a condemned and outlawed guerrilla. You know then my fate. Tell my brother, thus I fill the measure of my duty to my country. Living, I could do her little service. Dead, I shall have sealed in blood another testimony to the right, and joined the martyr-ranks which make her strong. With death already at my heart, I ask you to forgive, and to think lovingly of one who in life and in death is still faithfully yours,

“LIONEL RANDOLPH.”

Mrs. Rutledge ended, and, much moved, gave it back into the hand extended for it.

“My poor child”—she began, at a loss how to speak word of comfort to that passionless face. But there was no time given. The pale lips parted in quiet utterance:

“I am going to him at once. No, do not forbid it”—as her aunt, looking doubtful, would have spoken—“I should be sorry to disobey you, but I know that I am right. I have already spoken to Mr. Thorne—he will go with me.

It is but a day's journey—I compelled his messenger to tell me where."

"You will wait for me, Mr. Thorne. I must go in alone," Fadette said quietly to the old gentleman, as a soldier unbarred the door of the inner guard-room, where was confined the prisoner she sought.

The door swung heavily open. She took one step forward, and it closed again, with ominous clang, behind her.

Coming, as she did, from the strong glare of noon without, the apartment in which she found herself, lighted solely by a grating above the only entrance, was at first as utter darkness. But presently through the gloom she distinguished the four walls, the dank stone floor, and a pallet at the further end. From this a figure now slowly lifted itself—then as slowly sank back. She sprang forward.

"Lionel! Lionel!" she cried.

She was at his side—an instant, and she would have flung herself upon her knees before him. But she drew back hurriedly, astonished. The hunchback "innocent" was he who met her view. Seated on the pallet's edge, his head bowed down upon his hands, he never stirred at her approach. She paused a moment in bewilderment. And then there flashed a thought across her mind, which deepened into a conviction. Lionel had made good his escape by means of this poor creature, who could not fail to be released.

"Thank God! thank God! it must be so!" she cried aloud. And the tears, so long pent up in her benumbed heart, came in a rushing torrent, well-nigh painful in its sudden strain of joy.

But she checked her emotion, and conquering a shudder of aversion, placed her hand upon the poor misshapen shoulder before her. She said urgently, in a commanding

tone, which he had sometimes seemed to comprehend in a degree :

“Has he gone? Did he leave you here, and—”

Her speech died in a gasp. Her hand fell from his shoulder. Her parted lips grew white with terror. She shrank and trembled there before him, in unreasoning dread, fear of she knew not what. For he had raised his head and fixed his eyes upon her, for the first time with a full, unshadowed, and unvarying gaze.

No idiot’s—she felt at once.

He rose up, still thus looking on her.

“Do you know me now at last, Fadette?” he said.

And still she never moved, and still the dread grew stronger, ghastlier, upon her face.

“Why have you come? I would have died and left you ignorant of my death, but that I wished to set you free. I could have died more tranquilly without the pang of seeing you again shrink from me thus—without the pang of knowing you must henceforth associate this maimed, misshapen wretch—”

“Oh, Lionel!” she moaned at last. And she staggered one step forward, and clasped his arm with both her hands, a wild beseeching in her lifted eyes, from which the tears were dropping now.

The dark anger deepened on his brow. He would have shaken her off, but that she seemed so pale, so helpless. He said, instead :

“Hardly Lionel. Rather, an infatuated fool, who—struck from his horse in battle, and flung headlong with the dying brute far down a fearful steep—maimed thus in the fall—discharged as worthless to his country—still dreamed all life might not be over, and that, deformed and ghastly as he was, there was still one—”

“Hush, Lionel, dear Lionel,” she sobbed. “There is

still one. We shall manage to free you from this place, and then—and then—”

She felt the bond of long-ago, the breaking cords of which she now joined firmly thus together, closing about her with a pressure which almost suffocated her. He saw how she breathed hard and struggled for composure. He laughed in bitter mockery.

“And Ruthven Erle?” he said.

She quailed from his words as if they had been blows. Involuntarily, she loosed her clasp. He went on, watching in hot wrath her drooping varying face.

“As well you did not wait for misfortune, which ends all love, to break off yours. What, you would deny it? Do you not know, then, how the contemned idiot has watched? how he has lingered by you, though your every word, your every smile, was sharper than the death-pang? Your woman’s way—only your innocent woman’s way—luring us on with your soft replies, your downcast girlish glances, until—Well, you dearly love us, and sisterly, while we—God have mercy on us poor devils, for you have none.”

Blushing indignant crimson, Fadette raised her head, and looking at him steadfastly, she spoke in clear tones:

“Lionel, when you say that of me, you know you do not say truth. Until you yourself would have it otherwise, you were but a brother to my thoughts. The sincerity of what I did then, you dare not question. And if you have so watched, you know that he and I have stood as widely separated as if—as if—” she faltered, while her color deepened. “But I will not attempt,” she broke off with some pride, “to justify that which stands justified before my own conscience and before yours, when passion does not blind you.”

A long pause followed. Fadette had begun to repent

her hasty words, when he said, in tones as cold as hers had been—

“Leave me now, Fadette. I thank you for coming, but now I must be left alone. My letter contained all I wish to say to my brother; and for you, I must ask you to forgive. Forgive me, Fadette; a few hours hence would expiate greater sins than mine.”

“Lionel, what do you mean? Before this night is over, I will have arranged a way for your escape. You will surely, surely not refuse it? Have you a right to throw away your life?” she cried tremblingly, as he shook his head.

He regarded her with a strange smile.

“That has already passed out of my keeping, and out of yours,” he said. “There are circumstances, known too well to me, though not to you, which render any plan, however well arranged, perfectly impracticable. You have done, in thus coming to me, all that in any possibility can be done—far more than I dared hope. But—” and his tones were hurried, and he turned away, restlessly measuring the pavement with strides that echoed irregularly—“you need not waste another regret on me; welcome these fetters”—as they clanked with his hasty movement—“welcome even the death-hour, with its gaping crowds, its flaring steel, its—anything, everything, before life, and life only, at your hands,” he ended hoarsely.

She could not speak. She only sank down, bowed beneath a great despair.

He passed her in his pacing to and fro. Their glances met, and he was softened by the mute appeal of hers.

“Fadette, dearest, I was mad to grieve you thus,” he cried.

“What circumstances, Lionel? It cannot, cannot be!”

He sat beside her on the couch, and passed his arm around her in a quietly caressing way.

"Dearest," he said, "will you not believe me when I tell you in sad truth that they are such as render all escape impossible? These are my last moments, Fadette, these few with you—the last I care to live of those remaining," he amended hastily, as she started. "And you will not waste them on vain questions, which can bring but painful associations? Rather let my little sister speak to me of dear old Randolph Honor, in the days when she was all my own, and life was one long holiday. Those ties, Fadette—you need not break them now? When you are bound by newer ones, they will still be dear to you."

She laid her head upon his shoulder, weeping wildly.

"Lionel! O Lionel! I cannot let you go!" she moaned.

After a time her grief had spent its violence, and she leaned against him like a tired child, while sobs ever and anon shook her, the crimson lips still quivered, and tears yet welled up in the great dark eyes fixed upon vacancy. Then she roused herself, struck by a sudden doubt. She cried out, in trembling earnestness—

"You are not deceiving me or yourself, Lionel? You could not be so cruel."

He raised her hand clasped fast in his.

"God be my witness," he responded solemnly, "that I but speak the truth. Were life a priceless boon to me, it were yet beyond my reach."

"Ah, I will plead for it upon my bended knees! They cannot, they shall not deny me!" she said passionately.

He smiled in pity down upon her, drawing her yet closer to his side. From his gesture and his smile, she read how futile to him seemed her promise. Unshaken in that, though faltering in her hope, her face darkened after.

They sat thus, speechless, only holding by each other's

hands, as though that were all the grasp they both had upon life—all the hold that kept them both from drifting to despair.

She took no note of time—no thought of anything, save that perhaps they parted now forever. But he seemed to be listening to every sound without. He started and breathed faster as often as a step approached. More than once he admonished Fadette that it would be safer to delay there no longer. Until she assured him the captain had promised to summon her when she ought to go.

And silence fell again.

Then the door unclosed.

He, restless still, had caught the first approach, and had put Fadette gently from him, before there entered Mr. Thorne with an armed soldier. Fadette rose mechanically. But Mr. Thorne led her to her seat again.

“No, my dear,” he said; “you will wait here—it is your friend who is to go—”

Fadette did not note his hesitation, the trembling of the hand detaining her, nor the horror which had stricken the benign old face. She was looking at Lionel.

He stood before her, firmly and calmly—perhaps somewhat paler than but now, yet perfectly unmoved.

“They have sent for me, Fadette,” he said. “The captain has need of me a moment before you go. Remain here until you are summoned.”

“But you will come back—I shall see you again?” she cried, locking his hand in both of hers.

“Yes, yes—you shall see him again—just as long as you choose,” the guard made answer here.

Fadette caught at the words eagerly, perfectly unconscious of the brutal leer accompanying.

“Lionel, Lionel, they must be going to release you! Else why have they sent for you?” she cried.

And a gleam of hope flitted across her upturned face.

He made no answer, only pressed her hands closely as he disengaged them.

"Remember," he said, bending over her, in a tone for her ear alone, "you are my own. I hold you as my own still while I live—still."

"Still yours," she answered solemnly, and far more earnestly than in the former troth-plight.

A strange expression flashed into his eyes, and he moved as if he would have caught her to him. Oblivious of any standers-by, she raised her face to him simply and frankly, as in childhood's parting she might have done. But a cloud of melancholy gathered on his. With infinite tenderness he merely touched her hand again. Then—

"Till death us do part," he said. And turned hastily away.

Her eyes followed him as he quitted the apartment, with that tender pity which, as she had said, was far removed from love, but with which she now dedicated herself to the duty of a lifetime.

For as she sat there quietly, there seemed so little doubt of a reprieve, so little doubt of ultimate release, that even for one passing instant came the thought of Ruthven Erle.

It came, however, only to be resolutely put away.

Five, ten minutes, thus were gone, when footsteps passed the door. Waiting there listlessly, the weight of fear in great part lifted from her mind, she listened idly to the voices. They were low at first; then one exclaimed—

"What! the execution already? So soon? These men assembling now—"

At once the truth flashed on her. Her terrified glance sought Mr. Thorne. He stood there, his face covered, averted from her.

She sprang up. And before he could comprehend her

movement—before any bystander beside the door could intercept—she had rushed from the apartment, through the guard-room, and had gained the outer door.

Coming out from the dingy prison-cell into the strong noontide glare, she stood for one moment dazzled; faint and dizzy also with the sudden terror. The next, her straining, burning eyes were ware of a keener flash than that of the unshadowed sun which basked down straight upon the broad, wild, boundless prairie. A keener flash—a gleam of glittering uplifted rifles. A file of men drawn up to the left. And fronting them—

She started forward, a shriek striking apart the deathly lips. But it died gaspingly upon them. For Lionel was speaking.

With a gesture of command which overbore attempted opposition, he stood there. His eyes were flashing, his brow flushing, his voice rang clear, and strong, and full, with not one faltering of fear. No man who watched him there had thought for his deformity. The undaunted bearing—the proud consciousness of right—the fearless outlook—the impress of truth on brow, and voice, and gesture—swayed the crowd which gathered behind the soldiery. It was to that crowd he looked, to that he spoke:

“Friends who love the South, bear witness—I who die this day an outlaw’s death, raise now before the Great White Throne these fettered hands as stainless, reddened only by the blood shed for our country in honorable warfare. God be my Judge, and our country’s Avenger! God save the South! And receive my soul!”

With the words, he bent one knee on the rude coffin where he had been standing. The uplifted hands dropped with a clanking of the fetters. He bowed his head, awaiting.

But a wild shriek rent the air. The young girl flung

herself before the ominous glitter of that musketry. Her slight figure swayed and quivered in her passionate eagerness, her tender fury for the doomed man. Her eyes burned with a strange unnatural brilliance, her cheek flushed, her whole face lighted up with wondrous beauty and enthusiasm.

She stretched her hands out toward the throng.

"Save him! save him!" she cried out, in tones that thrilled the hearts of even foes. "You dare not let him die. For God will punish you with them! Oh, save him!"

He had started up erect at the first sound of that voice. For the first time a tremor shook his frame. A glow of tumultuous triumphant joy made instant glory on his face. He stretched his arms out toward her—to warn back, or claim her all his own.

But while the accents lingered on her lips, a strong grasp seized her powerless, and dragged her back. And then—

A flash of lifted steel—a sharp and cruel ring which pierced the flaunting noontide, and crashed and echoed in repeated sound. But ere those echoes died—ere yet the dense white cloud of smoke rolled by—Fadette had fallen senseless to the earth.





CHAPTER XXIV.

IN PRISON.

"My sun has set ; I dwell
In darkness, as a dead man out of sight ;
And none remains, not one, that I should tell
To him mine evil plight
This bitter night."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.



WOMAN! What the devil!" was the ejaculation, muttered or mental, of most of the half-dozen Confederate prisoners. The door of their cell was swung suddenly open to admit a veiled woman's form thrust in, and then as suddenly closed fast upon her.

As for the poor girl thus apostrophized, since that fearful day she had passed through those which intervened, with so little of life or thought remaining, that not until the echoed footfalls of her guard died in the corridor without, did she realize her situation.

She drew back her veil, and glanced wildly around.

The men had risen on her entrance. The noisy song was hushed—a worn-out pack of cards was pushed away—and one poor fellow struggled hastily into the gray coat which might conceal his tattered shirt.

Some pity, yet more annoyance, had been legible on every countenance. But now that the poor, pale face, with those dark rings beneath the startled eyes, showed so deathly wan and colorless, every one was moved to self-forgetful-

ness. And several advanced, lest, trembling as she did, she should fall.

Apart at the further end of the apartment, half-reclining, leaning on his arm, a slender youth now turned to look at the new-comer. Turned—and with an exclamation, that might seem of mingled pain and pleasure, started to his feet.

A mere stripling, as he stood before her. The firm red lips were fringed with a moustache, but the smooth cheeks had not yet lost the rosy bloom which still was glowing through the sunburnt hue. Glowing deeper while he paused before her there—paused as if he had abruptly checked himself from some intent.

“What! you know her, Hunter, then? A friend of yours?”

The voice spoke low behind him. He drew back hurriedly from the comrade’s arm which would have rested on his shoulder. Deeper yet, and yet more hotly, surged the blood up to the broad clear brow, where short brown hair waved crisply from the temples. He hesitated. Then he said in an unsteady tone—

“A friend? You see she does not know me. But, poor girl, poor girl, you are right—I, and you, and all here, are her friends. Now let us see what we can do for her—God help her!”

If the shapely hand brushed off a furtive tear, ere it dashed back impatiently the tress which fell upon the brow, the next instant it was busily at work, removing the most comfortable of the pallets into a remote corner, disposing a pair of blankets to serve as a screen, and making the few arrangements for comfort, which the united means of all the soldiers there afforded. As they proffered cheerfully their all, some one remarked, with a laugh, to the prime mover and director—

"What, Hunter! putting up one of those two blankets, of which you were so bent on making to yourself a tent—an oratory—or the devil knows what?"

But Hunter merely shrugged his shoulders.

"No contribution from the captain yet," he said. "I will go wake him."

Stretched upon his blanket on the floor, one arm a pillow for the head with its disordered rings of chestnut, the other flung across his eyes to shut out the day which only just was fading into twilight, lay the sought-for man, sleeping away the tedium of the weary, changeless hours. The lad bowed on one knee before him.

He called him—"Captain! Captain!"—twice or thrice. But still there came no movement in reply.

"Hunter, you foolish boy!" here cried a comrade; "your shield and safeguard slumbers like the seven sleepers. So—" and he advanced and shook him kindly, yet somewhat roughly, by the shoulders. But Hunter lent no helping hand. He drew back, coloring again, while with a drowsy muttered "Oh, confound you—can't a fellow rest in quiet?"—the shielding arm was impatiently withdrawn.

"Ah, Hunter, is it you?" he said, more gently.

The face thus exposed to view was one familiar. It was that of Harry—now Captain Harry—Thorne.

He shook himself free at once from sleep, and rose up, stretching himself and yawning. And in so doing, he first became aware of some unusual phase in the prison-life monotony.

"Why, what is the row?" he cried, advancing to a group of men.

But as these turned to meet him with an explanation, Fadette was now discovered to his view.

His hasty forward movement, and his exclamation, were both checked.

For she sat there on the chair on which she had first sunk down, almost unconscious. A death in life—so ghastly was the rigidity of the features, and the eyes gazed blankly out with the unmovedness of one to whom all hope, all future, has its end.

When Harry Thorne approached, and, beside himself with distress, caught her hand, and prayed for but one word, one sign that at the least she knew him, she turned those stony eyes one instant on him. And in a hollow tone, which sounded like the echo of a voice, she pronounced his name, then sat on abstracted as before.

But Hunter was now bending over her.

"Drink," he said gently, putting to her lips a tin cup of coffee which one had hastily made from the preparations for the evening meal. She obeyed mechanically. But the warm beverage brought no refreshing to her weary frame. With an effort she swallowed one mouthful, and looked up with an attempted smile of gratitude, more piteous than any tears.

Those men stood around her in reverent silence. Tears coursed their way down unfamiliar cheeks, from eyes which had gazed on a hundred battle-fields unmoved.

But she suffered the stripling, who quietly took authority, to remove her hat with tender womanly touch. And in utter exhaustion she sank, it seemed even tranquilly, upon her pallet.





CHAPTER XXV.

AT WATCH.

"So till the break of day
Then footsteps—"

DESPISED AND REJECTED.

RADETTE leaned in the grated window of the prison-chamber. Her wan cheek was pressed against the bars, her great dark eyes, with the black rings beneath, were fixed with a vacant, horror-stricken, yet almost unconscious immovability, upon the scene without.

In the glimmering dawn the Missouri rolled its yellow tides at the foot of the town, sweeping round the jutting point of its opposite shores, on which she gazed. It was not that she marked the glancing glitter of those crested hurrying waves, or the rich plenty of those southwestern banks, where the swaying glory of the harvest, now laid low, stood in stacks and sheaves awaiting the ingathering. But far, far away beyond, she traced, or seemed to trace, that scarcely noted road along which she had been whirled, and that broad sere prairie, with its weary waste of staring sunshine, its swaying throng, its dazzling steel, the blood-thirsty tiger-glare that flashed mercilessly. She made a convulsive effort to check thought there. But back and back it still would come. Last evening, the third of her captivity, she for the first time, yielding with the instinct of gratitude, had roused herself from that lethargy of woe in which she had sunk upon her pallet, and had let her

fellow-captives place her at the window for a breath of the balmy autumn air. Yet her attention could not follow to the sunset glory overhead, which the lad, his lip trembling with compassion, had pointed out. Instead, it had fallen on the blood-red tides, and thence, across in the far distance, had seemed to fall upon that fearful plain. A quiver had flitted across the set features, and she had broken into an uncontrollable agony of weeping—the first tears shed. With the early dawn, after the short heavy sleep of exhaustion, she now stole from her screened couch, without a glance on the men, who yet slumbered, stretched out wrapped in their blankets; or on the stripling who lay at her couch's foot, as if to guard it.

That aching tension upon brain and eyes, again was pressing down so heavily, that with unconscious longing for the tears last night had brought, she returned to the window where they had come to her, like a mist that drifted and gathered slowly from that plain afar, which yet was ever present to her shuddering sight.

The freshening breath of dawning brought no coolness to her fevered cheek, nor to her parched lips. The rosy glow of coming day touched her with no sense of brightness, though it blushed far to the southwestern horizon toward which she gazed. Through the hush of sleep which still enchained the town, the ripple of the ruffling waves surged with a restful murmur, and the breeze that thus passed over, bore on with it a waft of harvest-fields and mellowed prairie-pastures, beneath the fresh sweet dews of morning. Yet these fell on deadened senses. She yet leaned there with that rigid mouth, those burning eyes, that fever-heightened color.

A light touch fell upon her shoulder.* She did not heed at first. But she started when a voice at her side pronounced her name in a low distinct tone.

The stripling who had been ever beside her, with that gentle care, that tender guardianship, now bent over, and spoke her name again.

"You do not know me," he said, as the girl raised her head with a vacant outlook in the eyes that yet burned themselves free from tears.

She did not speak, but still kept them fixed there, unconsciously, as it were.

"Have you forgotten Beauregard—your friends at Sleepy Hollow—and—at the Homestead?"

Into the upraised eyes there swept a sudden shadow, and over the rigid face a cloud, and the cloud dissolved in a storm of tears, and the head dropped upon the arms flung wildly on the window-sill. Her choked voice gasped out:

"Poor Charley—poor Charley!—They murdered her loved ones too before her."

Her face thus turned away, and her thoughts reverting to her own ghastly misery, she could not see the emotion which convulsed the wonted calm of her companion, heaved the breast, and clenched the firm white hand that had just touched Fadette's shoulder, while his teeth set hard, almost grinding together in the struggle for composure. But in a moment that flashing glance was softened with tender drops of pity, as Fadette's fast-quivering but voiceless sobs shook her slight frame. Upon one knee he sank beside her.

"Aye indeed, poor Charlie!" he said in suppressed tones. "Alone in the world, without one to love and care for, without one to strive and struggle for! Can you see how, when these fiends at last unbound her fetters, and left her with a jeer, she staggered across, and sank beside her dead? How, one hand above her white-haired father's charred and blackened corpse, the other stroking back the clogged golden curls of her young brother, whose head, death-

heavy, she had lifted to her knee, she should in their presence thus take solemn oath, that while a blow remained to be struck for their country against such murderous wretches, all her strength should go to strike that blow? Can you see how, when her dead were laid in their last resting-place, heaven's free winds and dews alone could cool her burning brain, and the fulfilment-of her vow alone bring comfort to her? Can you see how she came in her disguise among her old familiar friends, beside Ruthven Erle and Harry Thorne marched and fought shoulder to shoulder as any other comrade,—was at last captured with Harry Thorne, and—"

"Charley! Charley!" cried Fadette.

She had been looking on her companion in perplexity and wonder, which increased with every word.

"Aye, Charley—" and the hand outstretched with trembling eagerness was taken in a firm close hold.

"But, remember," Charley said, quickly, "I am Charley only to you. You must guard my secret well. It has never been suspected."

"Oh, Charley, how could you keep it thus, so long?" Fadette asked, completely roused and interested.

"Not quite an age," Charley replied, smiling, as she saw how successful had been her aim in discovering herself.

"From the time of my joining the army under General Price in Arkansas, to my capture in Missouri, was but one month. And I warrant you, I withheld myself so much from my comrades, that I was pronounced toploftical. But this drew less attention, since we were pauselessly on the march, and I kept my place close to Captain Thorne, who pitied me for a poor young lad first venturing from home, and took me under his shadow. After we had crossed the Missouri line, and the entire army concentrated at Fredericktown, Mr. Erle, who had made his way in advance from

Arkansas, rejoined us, and he fell into Mr. Thorne's view of my position. So that I had two very efficient patrons. Indeed, in the only battle in which we fought side by side, it seemed that both, and Mr. Erle especially, had an idea it was their duty to see that this sapling, setting up to be an oak, was not cut down. Does not the bark hide well the lack of pith within?"

"Such a metamorphosis! You so fair, and now so dark—a moustache—"

"Much fiercer when I first adopted it. So fierce indeed, that on my first martial appearance in that and a most warlike plumed hat, there went across from camp-fire to camp-fire the greeting, "Come out from behind that moustache—we see your boots sticking out"—and a crowing as of all the roosters in Christendom. I stopped short, perfectly bewildered, and aghast at this unthought-of phase of military life. But at that moment Captain Thorne came by. He saw my consternation, and asked the cause, when a shout replied—"Been at old White's henroost, Captain—see that rooster's tail sticking out of his hat." It seems, the Captain had the day before arrested some of the men for that very deed. And when he ordered me to follow to his tent, after us came—"See, boys, chicken-soup for the whole shebang going into the Captain's tent—cock-a-ra-a." You may imagine I speedily let the rooster fly. But I did not lose with it my name of chicken-coop. And cock-a-ra-a was sung out many a time after Captain Thorne, whose good-humored recognition of the title made him still more popular. But I think if any one had that day hinted the other popular saying, 'Here's your mule'—I would have given up on the spot, convinced that the long ears were pricking out of my lion's skin."

"And you have actually been in a battle?" said Fadette, on whom the mention of Ruthven Erle had not been lost.

"What, did you think I would go to the army as a dead-head? An account of it? Certainly, from the word go, if you care to hear it.

"After we had left Fredericktown behind, and General Shelby had been detached with purpose to destroy the Iron-Mountain Railroad, we took up the line of march for Ironton. Nothing of interest occurred beyond an occasional skirmish with roving bands of 'Home Guards,' until we arrived in the vicinity of Arcadia, near Ironton, which, though well fortified and garrisoned by veteran troops, soon yielded to the rebels' impetuous attack. The enemy, closely pursued by our cavalry, retreated northward through the little town of Ironton, and finally took position in the fort at Pilot Knob. About ten o'clock our Division arrived at Ironton, and while General Fagan's was being dismounted and formed across the road and valley leading from Ironton to Pilot Knob, ours was dismounted and marched to the summit of Shepherd's Mountain, in full view of the enemy's position, fort, and the town of Pilot Knob. From the crest of the mountain to the centre of the fort was about fifteen hundred yards, and from Fagan's position to the fort was nearly the same.

"Shepherd's Mountain, facing the enemy, had been partially cleared of timber, leaving the huge boulders jutting out of the steep declivity, which might seem the work of some terrible earthquake.

"Everything was now in readiness for the assault, each and every one anxiously awaiting the signal-guns. There were in the fort from thirteen to fourteen hundred veteran infantry, and artillerymen to man sixteen guns, four of which were siege-pieces, capable of being brought to bear on any point—"

"Oh, Charley," Fadette here interposed, "how learnedly

you discuss things which would have been enough to terrify another girl to death."

"Do you think I was born in the woods to be scared by an owl? But, however—

"Shortly after two, General Fagan opened with his two guns, the bugles sounded the advance, and the entire line rushed forward, General Fagan's Division coming up from the southeast, and General Marmaduke's Missourians descending the mountain from the south. Gallantly our line pushed on in face of a murderous shower of shot, shell, and canister. The heroic Cabell had his horse killed under him within fifty yards of the fort, and, sword in hand, headed his brigade on foot. At last the ditch encircling the fort was reached, and to our utter dismay was found to be impassable—twelve feet wide, ten deep, and to the top of the embankment at least fifteen feet. The only poem I ever knew flashed over me:

"Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!" he said:
Into the valley of death
Rode the six hundred.

"Beyond a doubt we were gone up for ninety, if we remained. Our situation was one of great peril. Every volley thinned our ranks. There was nothing left, but, under a storm of deathly missiles, to recross that bloody valley, and up that steep acclivity, where the rocks yet bear the crimson stain left by many an unknown hero.

"The troops of both Divisions, weary and worn as they were, camped for the night in and around Iron-ton, and in the mean time ladders were to be prepared on which at dawn to scale the walls of the stronghold. All orders were issued for the second attack. The night was clear and

cold, and the moon shone brightly over the sleeping army, and the mountains where, it seemed to sleepless me, still rang the concussions which only a few hours since had shaken them to their very centres. The moon went down about two o'clock, and not long after the whole earth rocked with an explosion. The Federal commander had blown up the fort, abandoned his position and artillery, his sick and wounded, and vamosed northward at a howling pace. We were speedily in pursuit, and alas for Mr. Thorne and me, a skirmish sealed our fate. We were sent here prisoners."

"And did you feel no fear in battle?"

"Must I confess it?—no little at first. The first fire nearly fanned me right out of my cavalry boots. But courage as well as cowardice is contagious. When Harry Thorne's sword flashed before me, and Ruthven Erle aimed steadily at my side—Oh, how grand he is in battle—"

"He? Who?" Fadette inquired.

Charley blushed crimson, and laughed.

"Why—both, of course. Fine child, fine child, both. But I defy any one not to be enthused beside brave men. And when they fell around, who would not strike in just avenging? And I had more, far more, to nerve me," she added in a husky voice.

Fadette laid her hand softly upon Charley's, and tears trembled on her lashes.

But Charley shook herself free from thoughts she dared not harbor.

"It is a great promoter of valor, that idea of keeping a guard on your own meat-house," she said lightly. "And now I am going to make a wonderful confession, which I shall expect you to keep profoundly secret. You will probably understand that I went into the army in the conviction that Pharaoh's order concerning the boys was the

wisest mandate ever issued, and that women were not permitted to go into battle, merely because they were too valuable to risk. But my judgment was very like a warped piece of homespun, which wanted the filling. Experience has woven in quite another thread of ideas, which, as it is not putting new cloth into old garments, but merely filling up the warp, may be expected to hold together. I still firmly believe that, to keep my parable of the loom, women have a very material part in the web of this world, but—it is to fill the interstices between the men; and—the men are very right to hold them fast in their position. Yes,” she added shamefacedly, “we are formidable as Manassas’ wooden guns, which may keep a timid enemy in check until he summons resolution to approach.”

“Is that spoken of your campaigning? Charley, this disguise is more perfect than Confederate gray.”

“No, not of campaigning exactly. I will still affirm I struck some blows. But I did not take the starch out of every masculine collar, as I half anticipated. Very like the snips—nine Charley Goodfellows would make a man. And if I were not played out so completely here, I think perhaps—perhaps—my oath would be best kept by nursing in the hospitals, and thus restoring others to strike stronger blows than mine.”

A silence followed. Into Fadette’s eyes came once more the troubled cloud of memory. They wandered back, abstracted, to the view across the river, ending in imagination in that field of blood. Charley spoke to her, all unheard. But while she was revolving how to rouse her, from the street below arose a hurried tread of many feet, excited tones, a rushing tumult.

Fadette sprang up, the blood returning to her face.

“Hark, Charley, hark!” she cried. “Did you not hear ‘the rebels’—can it be possible that our troops are coming?”

Charley listened, her cheek too aglow.

With every moment did the sounds increase. And now the thunder of artillery burst forth.

It startled one and all of the captives to their feet. They crowded round the further window. Harry Thorne was at this one in a moment.

"Hunter, Hunter, we are free!" he cried in great excitement, clapping his *ci-devant* brother-in-arms enthusiastically upon the shoulder.

Charley shrank back, glancing at Fadette with embarrassment. But she recollected herself sufficiently to reply in her accustomed tone—

"Yet Glasgow is well fortified and strongly garrisoned—its walls are bristling with cannon, and—Great Heaven, Mr. Thorne, how can we listen to those guns, and know our men are falling, and we cannot help them?"

Her blue eyes flashed fire as she spoke. She stood up, quivering with eagerness, her color burning brighter.

Harry Thorne, whose pulse had bounded higher on a hundred battle-fields to those same echoes, and who now was striding back and forth like an angry lion chafing against his prison-walls, stood still and looked at her approvingly.

"Of such as you are heroes made," he said, and wrung the hand she clenched upon her breast.

He cast a pitying glance upon Fadette, who on her knees before the window watched the wreaths of smoke that wavered here across the sky at every volley, and were all that told the captives of the battle's ebb and flow. Tears shut the vision out from time to time, and coursed each other down her death-white cheeks. Her pale lips murmured broken prayers and sobs, and now a stifled moan, when louder than before crashed forth the fierce artillery. Each thunder-peal that shook the air, and made the little

city totter to its centre, struck upon and shattered the girl's very heart. Never before had she been within ear-shot of a battle, and every surging shock, it seemed to her, rolled on laden with destruction, and must sweep away whole ranks of the brave men breasting it. No life of all laid freely down for Southern Freedom was indifferent to her, and in her most unthinking days she had been wont to pray for them with heartfelt earnestness. And foremost in the conflict now, she seemed to see Ruthven Erle, still pressing on.

Little of the heroine was in her aspect. And the fanciful admiration which had come and gone at intervals through Harry Thorne's acquaintance, received, after sundry wounds inflicted by her oblivion of him through her captivity, its death-blow from her cowardice, as he believed it.

"If she had but a tithe of this boy's spirit," he commented inly, "it would become her great dark eyes much better than this fear."

Thus more than two hours went by heavily, each moment bearing to the listeners the weight of years. The glow of hope had never left young Thorne, the flush was still on Charley's brow—when on the storm of conflict closed an awful calm.

The raging of the fight had been appalling. But this hush, as of the grave, was far more awful.

Moments passed, and all was over. The suspense, to those shut out from knowledge of the issue, was unbearable. Harry Thorne shook the door in frenzy. But its iron bolts and studded panels remained firm. Charley stood with fingers clenched together to compel herself to quiet. And Fadette was waiting, holding by the wall, swaying and shivering at every sound that entered through the street below.

And now a sound was really coming near. Footsteps, and ringing spurs, and steel, upon the stairs. Bolt after bolt withdrawn along the corridor. And now at last this door—

Fadette was powerless to move. She only shivered, staggering where she stood, and gazing wildly round with dilated eyes. And must have fallen—but that Ruthven Erle in one swift stride had caught her in his arms.





CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE MARCH.

. . . . "Gird his harness on him,
And ride with him to battle, and stand by
And watch his mighty hand striking great blows."

ENID.

THE sun had gone down on Glasgow at peace. After a hotly contested combat, that town's commanding General, perceiving the intention of the Confederates to carry the works by storm, had run up the white flag, and surrendered his fourteen hundred men and strong defences to the gallant General Clarke and his thirteen hundred Missourians of the dashing Light Horse Division. But the prisoners, although paroled for regular exchange, were many of them soon again upon the "war-path."

However, the substantial fruits of this victory were immense—army stores, arms, cavalry horses, and bountiful rations for the worn and weary troops.

Another day had come and gone, the Missouri had been recrossed the Glasgow victors rejoined the main army, and within a few miles of Lexington, Shelby had as usual defeated the enemy in a severe engagement, and encamped upon the battle-field, the entire army resting near.

And now another dawning flushed the skies.

Fadette was before the open tent, where two ladies, wives of officers of the Division, waited, ready for the move attendant upon early marching-orders. Under their care

had Ruthven placed her, when she trembled and shrank from the thought of remaining alone at Glasgow until her aunt should come to seek her—or till she should perhaps be made a prisoner again. He had yielded to her pleading to be taken to Amy, in the army's southward march. And these lady-friends of his had cordially received her.

Beside her stood a tall, broad-shouldered girl, who in her womanly attire was the Charley Goodfellow of old. The metamorphosis was brought about by Ruthven Erle. When, accompanied by the *ci-devant* Hunter, he had led Fadette from the prison to a hotel parlor in the town, he had suddenly turned to Charley, saying—

“And now, my dear Mr. Hunter, I must request you to make way as speedily as possible for Miss Charley Goodfellow. This request has been frequently upon my lips since first we met at Fredericktown, but Miss Charley would at that time have found it awkward to appear. What, must I again abate somewhat of my zeal in attacking the enemy, because of the necessity to parry and ward in your defence?”

And Charley, laughing and blushing, had been compelled to repeat the admission confessed to Fadette a few hours before, and reluctantly to acknowledge that since even the two thousand stand of arms that day acquired would not furnish nearly all the volunteers, every musket could be put in stronger, abler hands than hers. A hint that in her true capacity she could do far more service in caring for the wounded, somewhat consoled her.

Why the two girls waited there, was presently made evident as Ruthven Erle and Harry Thorne rode up. For but a moment's pause, however. They were to march immediately, their command being in front.

“Should you hear firing, do not be alarmed,” said Ruthven, as Fadette, a faint color stealing into her pale face,

stood by and stroked his horse's mane, he in his haste still mounted.

—"Blunt's Kansas forces, whose advance was yesterday defeated, we may have to encounter probably to-day. Nay, do not fear," as she looked up, and tried to speak with quivering lips. "Remember, we are your vanguard. And thus I ride forth your knight, bound to defend you."

He stooped, and gently drew from the hand that rested trembling on the horse's neck, a glove which it had held. He placed it against the black plume in his hat, secured by a silver crescent, cross, and star, the badge of his brigade. And grasping her passive fingers one instant firmly in his own, meeting her timid eyes with one bright flashing gleam of fearlessness, he put spurs to his horse, and speedily had vanished from the wistful gaze which followed.

Harry Thorne had been the while at Charley's side, glancing down on her from time to time with mingled admiration and bewilderment. Her color was slightly heightened by the embarrassment which his observation still occasioned, since the identity of his comrade had been disclosed to him at Glasgow. Her wonted composure of manner was softened by that embarrassment, and her whole appearance in such striking contradiction to the stripling who had fought undaunted at his side, that the young soldier continually watched her with puzzled interest, and approval of her present self, tinged by the remembrance of the stripling's daring, and withal retiring womanliness. He felt a growing satisfaction in the transformation. As Ruthven Erle had possessed himself of Fadette's glove, Thorne had stooped to beg the knot of ribbon with which Fadette had decked out Charley. And she gave it with a smile and a half sigh, and a warning that if he wore it, he must remember he had double blows to strike—those for himself, and those his quondam comrade must now leave to him.

The color surged over her face as she thus spoke; and over his, while he bowed low and rode away.

Upon the bank of the Little Blue River, hid from observation by a clump of low-branched trees, an ambulance had halted. The pale-faced women who thus ventured nearer—in view of that field where all their hopes were centred—had seen the skirmish-line which crossed the stream, had watched it drive the enemy's rear back to the west side of the bottom, and beheld Blunt's forces, some three thousand men, occupying the hills which overlooked the creek and bottom. The brave "Light Horse Division" had soon crossed, dismounted, formed, the bugles sounded the advance, and the whole line moved forward. The enemy's position was one of great strength, for, besides his elevation, several stone fences ran parallel with the advancing force, and gave his troops an excellent shelter.

"Look, look!" cried Charley, in excited haste, 'as she now took possession of the field-glass; "the Federals waver—are dismayed! For see how we sweep onward, firmly and determined!"

However, the confusion was but momentary. From the heights, artillery now thundered down, replied to by the guns of the Confederates. An instant, and the lines were within musket-range, and the conflict now began in earnest.

Volley followed volley, till the field was dark with smoke. The heavy atmosphere came drifting even here, where still those women, breathless, speechless, quivering to every deep reverberation echoed long from ridge to ridge, gazed movelessly through blinding tears. Many a hero went down while they watched. Yet every loss but served to make the thinned ranks more determined. Now and then, athwart the sulphurous mists, flashed out a gleam of steel, and in the waver of the smoke was recognized a friend.

Thus Harry Thorne was marked, and Ruthven Erle, in thickest of the fight. Their general and his gallant staff were seen, ever under the severest fire, encouraging the troops so worthy of them. Volley followed volley, yet the foe still stood their ground.

"My God! my God! strike for us now!" cried Charley suddenly.

There had been a momentary lull; but she discerned its import. The brigade was to be hurled against the enemy's position.

That fearful fire, none who heard it may forget. Those moments of suspense, while thunderous clouds wrapped from the yearning sight that storm-black crest—how many a daring deed was done before they passed! Thrice in that charge had Gen. Marmaduke his horse killed under him. Again did Col. Greene add later laurels to those won at Pilot Knob. And General —, aye and many a private, known alone in the proud memory of their comrades.

The moments passed. The death-dark mists rolled sullenly away. And as they disappeared, revealed the dashing "Light Horse," victors of those heights.

It was evening. The enemy had continued his retreat beyond Independence, which town the Confederates occupied, encamping for the night.

In a parlor of the principal hotel, Fadette was lounging wearily upon the sofa. The triumph of the day was intermingled with much of pain. The wounded men she had been tending since the halt, so thronged her memory with their ghastly sufferings, the stillness was so weighted with their stifled groans, that moments lagged like hours while she awaited Charley before going to her room.

She had been trying to read, but the strong light an-

noyed her. And now, lowering it to a half twilight, she moved her seat to the open window, dropping her head upon the sill, and welcoming the chill October air which brushed against her throbbing temples.

As she rested there, her fingers, intertwined, sought, as was their wont of late, that ring which bound her to a remembrance of the dead. She was twirling it idly round her finger, when a step sounded close beside her. She started, and in the movement the ring fell.

It was Ruthven Erle, who had been watching her some moments ere he had drawn nearer, and who saw the lost treasure flash across his path. An angry impulse urged him to set his heel upon it. But he raised it from the carpet, and advanced.

Fadette's eyes met his. The color rushed into her face. For when she put her hand out for the ring, he placed it on her finger as he had done that night upon the gallery of the little backwoods cabin. Then, stronger still, came back the memory of Lionel. And involuntarily she bent her head and touched his gift, whose bond could hurt no longer, with her lips.

The angry blood flushed Ruthven's brow.

"You are far more cruel than I thought you could be," he said hoarsely.

Recalled by his tone, she looked up. The haughtily reproachful glance which met her own, broke down all her reserve. She stretched both hands out toward him, while she cried—

"Mr. Erle! When this alone is left to bind me still to Lionel?"

"To Lionel? And who is Lionel? Is not this Lloyd Randolph's ring?" he demanded.

He would then have grasped the hands he had but now refused to see. But she, with quick instinct feeling that

with the dead man's name upon her lips she could not yield her hand to living lover, drew back, while with hesitating utterance she told him how he had at first deceived himself, and she had deepened his impression, always naming Lionel by his alias.

He did not interrupt her with one word. For he had both seen and understood her withdrawal. He looked down on the lashes weighted low with tears for Lionel. A deep true love within his heart, he stood aloof in reverence of her sorrow.

Thus she had meant he should do. She felt his generosity, as day by day she had grown surer of his love. Through all her unfeigned grief for Lionel, there was the comfort of this other's care, and now she rested under it, and needed not a word or glance.

And needed not a word or glance. But in the days that followed? It has been said: "Eternity itself cannot give back the loss struck from a moment."

She lingered, hardly stirring, till the door opened to admit Charley, with Captain Thorne and one of the ladies under whose care were the young girls.

Fadette roused herself into gayety, to give the lie to any trace of tears. And when Harry Thorne advanced, with an embarrassed apology for the somewhat disordered state of his dress, she swept him her prettiest courtesy, like her old coquettish self of "Beauregard."

"Ah, Captain Thorne," she said, "our heroes

'crowned for vanquishing,
Should bear some dust from out the ring.'

But what news? Do we march again to-morrow?"

"Your say-so would declare for another day of Independence? But don't you know, to make inquiries of a mere captain, is 'dropping buckets into empty wells?'"

"Nevertheless, 'I rede ye tent it,' " she responded gayly. "But as for the dropping, we young ladies might reply, 'tis our vocation, Hal.' For, oh, the queries we put forth to one and all, and either draw up nothing whatever, or something far from truth. You are all too deep for even a sounding!"

"What now?" asked Charley, joining them with her new friend—"Dropping buckets into empty wells, you say? Quite sure your buckets are not warped and leaky? If so, mend them before you accuse the wells."

"A Saul among the prophets!" Mr. Erle exclaimed. "My dear Miss Charley, you are defending our maligned sex!"

"Miss Charley is a powerful ally," began Captain Thorne, well pleased.

"Fair and softly," she interrupted, in more confusion than the occasion warranted; "because you catch sight of one puny shoat of an opinion, don't rest secure none of the old rattlesnakes remain. Remember, the tribe was to bruise men's heel—and you are none of you less vulnerable than that ancient hero who—whose name I have forgotten," she ended, laughing.





CHAPTER XXVII.

EBB-TIDE.

Maimed and ruined ! I watched beside,
As calm as lie the dead.
Another's image on his breast—
On mine, his fainting head.
Not Fortune's tide alone, but Love,
Had from his heart ebb'd far—
A fresh love, strong beneath the moon,
Swept o'er the harbor-bar.



NCE more at dawn stood Ruthven Erle beside Fadette. The Confederate army, sorely pressed by tremendous odds, had continued on its march until it was now encamped in Kansas, on the soil of natural enemies.

From the day the Confederates first crossed the line into Missouri, to the night of the twenty-fourth of October, they had engaged the foe thirty-eight different times. On as many fields they had raised "the shout of victory o'er and o'er," and oftentimes had reaped the harvest of success. They had received some seven thousand recruits, from three to four thousand stand of arms, and many wagons laden with the spoils of war. But at last the ammunition-trains were well-nigh empty, thousands and thousands of captured rounds having been expended. The veteran ranks were thinned at least one-fourth. And hostile hordes now hovered on front, flank, and rear.

Ruthven's brow, as Fadette looked brightly up to him, hopeful even in her anxiety, was clouded with the knowl-

edge that the total of eleven thousand armed men, with hardly half a dozen rounds of ammunition, and horses broken by long service, were feeble indeed to meet the twenty thousand of fresh troops presently to be hurled upon them.

Shelby was already on his line of march in front. The cumbrous train was just about to move. And Ruthven Erle one moment tarried there to say farewell.

To him it was a solemn moment. For the "Light Horse Division" was to bring up the rear, with orders to hold the enemy in check until the trains could be well under way. And among that handful, who should breast "the crimson tide of battle" to the end?

The morning was clear, calm, and cold. Fadette leaned from the ambulance which waited for the other ladies. The freshness of the hour brought a freshness to her cheek, a quicker bounding to her pulses. The silver-gray light across the far-spread prairie flowed level to the foot of mounds at every few miles lifting themselves hundreds of feet above the slumbering meads—here sere, there faintly green and golden in their stillness. And over all was deep tranquillity. Fadette turned cheerfully to Ruthven—

"Ah, Mr. Erle, can there be anything to dread to-day? All is so peaceful and so calm."

‘ Si ch’a bene sperar m’era cagione,
L’ora del tempo, e la dolce stagione.’

She quoted softly.

"And should the shining blue-coat enemy appear, ablaze with gilt and steel, would you then add,

‘ Di quella fèra la gaietta pelle? ’"

he responded lightly.

"No, that I would not," she made answer with a shudder;

"only I trust we shall see nothing of them. But where do you ride to-day, Mr. Erle?"

"To guard the train," he said.

"Ah, then you will not be in danger."

He answered nothing, seeing that she had misunderstood. But he almost regretted that reticence, when her friends now came to take their places in the ambulance. For with a sudden whim, and a mocking smile more like those so fain of old, she refused her hand in parting to "the wagoner," and waved him only a blithe *au revoir*.

A blithe *au revoir*!

"To guard the train," the gallant "Light Horse" held the rear, defending, with severe loss to the foe, the west bank of the little creek which flowed between. And moving out at last from the skirting timber, "to guard the train" they formed on the open prairie and met the Federals in force.

Once more "to guard the train," when its defenders reached the high ridge commanding Mine Creek, and to their utter consternation saw the wagons huddled together, as it were, on the near side of the stream, without an instant's faltering they stood to bear the brunt of overwhelming odds.

Upon this frail little battle-worn band of cavalry—there had been no time to dismount—re-enforced by the brave Fagan at the head of his column, were now hurled the twenty thousand of the enemy. The whole earth rang beneath their tread—their twenty thousand sabres far out-flashed the sunshine.

To meet this fierce array of steel, did Marmaduke lead on the dauntless Eighth. And thus the two whom Charley and Fadette deemed safe, were hand to hand with the foe in the unequal conflict. Hand to hand—yet for them not

one thought arose from those two watchers praying with full hearts for the stanch Confederates doing battle in those impenetrable clouds of smoke which rolled and gloomed upon the ridge.

And the train, thus rescued, passed the stream.

The storm, so long in gathering, now burst upon us. The stars and bars floated bravely through it for a time, but the odds were irresistible as ocean-billows. Whelmed and swept away, our lines were broken. Yet not till many had expended their last shot, and often at close quarters.

Individual deeds of gallantry were many, very many. In the fierce red light of battle, how those high true souls shone out! Defeat, and ruin, and despair, and death—these glared on them relentlessly, ablaze from the foeman's serried ranks. There was now no hope—there could be none. It was but life for life—the pouring of their hearts' blood to redeem the comrades down below there on the southward march. The resistless billows rolled upon them and swept friend from friend. In the fearful Mahlstrom, many and many a peerless life went down.

In the fiercest of the current, in the deadliest of the sulphurous surge—still following their General and his staff—were Ruthven Erle and Harry Thorne.

The last flag of the South which waved upon that field—the Crescent, Cross, and Star, out-flashing silver-white against its blue—was borne and saved by Marmaduke's escort.

The heroic Cabell was a prisoner. And as Marmaduke surrendered to his captors an empty pistol, Ruthven Erle, wielding one last blow, in hopeless rescue of his General, fell heavily to the earth, his sword-arm shattered.

The fragments of the broken columns were collected on the south side of Mine Creek. And when the night closed

in, the army was beyond the Marmiton, encamped for rest.

The two young girls had been sitting together before the tent in mournful silence.

"Oh, Charley, is it not strange that we hear nothing yet of—Capt. Thorne?" Fadette asked at length, hesitating, and with a quick impulse of gratitude to the darkness for veiling the color she could feel mount upward to her brow.

"Very strange that we hear nothing yet of—Mr. Erle," Charley rejoined with an arch glance, that was not altogether thrown away in the flickering light of the camp-fire. "A perfect no-account! Ordered to ride with the train, and yet they give us all day no sign of recognition, no word of encouragement! What can be gone with them? I shall just orderly seize upon the first passer-by as escort, for I know we can be of use to the wounded, and our two chaperons are engrossed with their own.

"What, Charley, you desire escort or chaperon?"

Charley laughed, confusedly.

"When the bank once begins to cave in," she said, "you might as well yoke the oxen to your house, for there is no knowing where it will stop. But look! Who is that?—Why, Mr. Thorne, it is not possible you have remembered us at last! And where is your chosen comrade, most doughty squire of baggage-wagons?"

"I—I thought—has not Erle been here?" he said, advancing and looking around eagerly.

"Not he—Stay, whither away so fast? We have been waiting for you—can we not go to visit the wounded?"

"Yes—yes—of course. But can you not wait—until—"

The darkness covered the expression of anxiety which settled more heavily upon his face. Charley only thought his manner hurried and abrupt.

"No, that we cannot," she replied; "but if you have not time to take us, we two will go together. Come—"

She stood up, beckoning to Fadette.

But for all reply, he drew her hand within his arm.

This protecting care was a novelty to her, and she looked at him curiously, doubting somewhat whether to remove her hand. But presently, overworn with the fatigue and the excitement of the day, she found herself leaning on him with a sense of relief.

They had walked but a short distance thus, out of the camp-fire light, when Fadette suddenly stopped short.

"Look—look!" she cried. "There—there—Does he not lie there like one dead? Oh, Mr. Thorne!"

Before them, fallen prone beneath the shadow of a clump of bushes, lay a man outstretched. The rigid outline, the bared head thrown back, the arm dropped slack upon the turf, resembled more the long last rest, than that which many a wearied veteran was snatching now in haste. Harry Thorne was in one instant at his side. While he stooped to feel for some pulsation of the heart, Fadette approached, and flashed the lantern which she carried full upon the ghastly face.

With a long low wail, she sank upon her knees.

For the blaze revealed the fixed and death-like countenance of Ruthven Erle.

She did not hear the cry of dread that broke from Charley, nor the groan from Harry Thorne. She was unconscious of the murmured consultation. And only when at the young soldier's bidding Charley put her arm around the drooping form, and would have raised and led her back whence they had come, she roused and shook off her friend impatiently.

"I will not leave him! Go!" she cried. And again she had forgotten all, except the death that seemed before her.

She was presently aware that while Charley waited with her, Captain Thorne had gone to seek a surgeon. But she drew no hope from that. Thus beneath the flickering moonbeams on the dead autumnal leaves had Mr. Grahame lain. Thus in the noontide glare, which flaunted on the ebbing of the life-tide, Lionel had fallen. No ghastlier light than now, had wavered upon either brow, no redder pool had dyed the sod than that which gleamed upon the grasses where she knelt.

But when the surgeon came, and taking Charley's place at the right, opposite Fadette, after a silent examination pronounced slowly,

"No—he is not dead"—

Fadette looked up, the color flashing back into her face.

"Oh, Dr. Smith—" she began.

"No—a prisoner with our general," said the stranger. "But we will see what we can do. This is your husband?" And he gave her a compassionate glance.

"No—but my cousin," she hesitated,—the claim she once had scoffed at, caught up now in trembling eagerness, lest her right to stay beside him might not be awarded.

"Ah, that is better," he returned, apparently relieved. "Your cousin, then, has only swooned. But"—and he touched the right arm lying on the turf beside him—"this must be amputated, and at once. You had best leave us. I will send for you again when all is over."

A low faint moaning at the surgeon's touch just quivered on the rigid parted lips. Consciousness had slowly been reviving, and now his eyes unclosed upon Fadette. The light had faded from her face again, a shudder shook her frame. But she said firmly—

"I shall remain here. Do what must be done, at once."

He surveyed her doubtfully.

"You cannot bear it," he replied. "And if you should give way—"

Across the helpless man she stretched her hand to him.

"Do you see how steady it is?" she said. "You must trust me. I shall not fail you."

Her clear and resolute accents reassured him. And while Harry Thorne drew near to his assistance, and Charley, her lips set in determined self-control, upheld the lantern, Fadette had turned again to Ruthven Erle.

He, thus wounded, captured, and escaping, as did many a one that day, not closely guarded, had followed fast and far the army on its march, and, the goal attained at last, had fallen from his horse, exhausted with the loss of blood. He was still powerless to speak. But he had heard the surgeon's words. The ring of the surgical instruments as they were taken forth, interpreted them yet more clearly to his wandering senses. He riveted upon Fadette a gaze of keenest agony. She met it with undaunted courage.

"Thank God it is not death!" she whispered.

And she laid her hand upon his brow, and smoothed aside the waves of hair that clung so dankly to the temples, which appeared already sharp and gaunt with pain.

His eyes were following her every movement, the fierceness of their anguish passed away. Anon, with a strong effort, his left hand moved toward hers. She understood, and laid hers in it. And as she did so, the operation had begun.

She had placed herself so facing him, that to observe the surgeon's motions would have been to turn. And thus when now the work commenced, and when the pang grew keener and more keen, she only knew it by the hold that tightened on her hand. That hold, which strengthened him, strengthened her too. His gaze for not one instant wavered from her face. And when her misery seemed too

great to bear, and a cloud was gathering in her eyes, his darkened so, that for his sake she forced herself to firmness. Every sound of the instrument, each touch that jarred his frame, she quivered under in her inmost heart, yet kept her muscles steady. For he looked, he clung to her.

A low deep groan, at last. A deathlier shade stole over the countenance so wan before.

"He has swooned again," Fadette gasped out.

She clenched her disengaged hand upon her bosom, struggling hard for fortitude. A sense of suffocation, a panting for breath, seized on her. Another moment, and she would have lost all self-control. But the surgeon's firm tone recalled her—

"Steady one moment longer, it is almost over."

The moment passed. The work was finished.

The man whom she had loved with proud reverence for his strength, now lay before her, prostrate, maimed, and in great measure helpless for all time.

And yet she bent above him; and although the great tears fell, and tenderness of pity softened all her face to sweetness indescribable, not in his most triumphant moments had such pride in him been hers. And while she thought how dear it would be should he claim her for his helping arm, a sense of her unworthiness for the first time weighed upon her.

She was startled by an exclamation from the surgeon—

"Ha, here is a bullet-mark—I trust no dangerous wound again," he said anxiously, as, raising the lantern, he discerned a small round hole pierced through the coat.

But no—the shot had been arrested, for no wound was there. With an ejaculation of surprise, he searched, and presently drew forth a tiny oval miniature. And there embedded was the bullet.

Fadette mechanically held out her hand for it.

Shattered as was the case, the ivory portrait within was scarcely injured. It was not difficult to recognize the faultless features of Matoaca. Fadette knew it at once as a gift of months ago to herself. Ruthven Erle must then have taken possession of it on that last day of Prairie-Combe.

She put it back without a word. Charley and Harry Thorne exchanged smiling glances. Both were well assured it was Fadette's own face.

Through the long forced marches which began before that night had brightened into day—through fatigue, and that anxiety which made those marches wearier still, while the foe yet hovered in great numbers menacingly about the shattered army—Fadette hardly left Ruthven Erle's side. And when the enemy, at length defeated at Newtonio in the last engagement of the expedition, ceased longer to molest the southward-bound, she kept her post through all the horrors of that thirteen days' march across the Indian country, where suffering, sickness, hunger, death, and disappointment lurked along the barren prairies of the Creek and Choctaw nations, and dogged relentlessly each toilsome footfall. But in the fever's long delirium, when the wounded man called wildly on her name, or moaned it tenderly in calmer intervals, she only shuddered and grew pale.

And when at last the army crossed Red River into Northern Texas, long the Promised Land, "the land flowing with double rations," and Ruthven, convalescent, had no further need of care, Fadette's avoidance of him was so marked, her bearing so reserved and cold, that he could but revert to her own words of the past: "The love could hardly be the same."

The war-worn heroes rested now. They had been in the saddle a hundred days and thirty nights, and had marched

more than two thousand miles. They had traversed Arkansas, her mountains and her rivers, and crossed the rugged sections of Missouri, following the Missouri's muddy waters hundreds of miles. Kansas, the Indian country, had been on their line. Cities and towns by scores had fallen in their hands. Enormous army-stores had been appropriated to their use. They had met the common enemy at home thirty-nine different times, and success and complete victory had been theirs on thirty-eight battle-fields. And now they stacked their arms—for a brief respite, as they thought. They saw not how the shadow of the future crept and closed in dark and darker on the war-path.

Night on the war-path, while Charley's oath was kept in the hospitals. Fadette was gone to Amy Weir, who, with her husband, was at Shreveport, at headquarters. She had parted from Ruthven Erle with a hurried, cold farewell. And "the loss struck from the moment" which at Independence had been his, was not restored.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

BIDING THE SURRENDER.

Maimed and ruined—but I—I cried :
My heart is strong for thee—
Only to lean there and rest awhile,
Perchance might comfort be—
To lean, and, leaning, strengthen it,
While we two, being one,
Shall feel thy soul's supporting arm
Guide on, till day is done.

IT was evening.

The crimson tide of sunset flooded all the skies, and rippled through the oaks that clustered round a home-enclosure. Woodlands bared of undergrowth closed in around the bloomy square where stood a broad white-columned mansion, surrounded by ample galleries. The garden spread before, a wild luxuriance of roses, myrtles, and magnolias. So isolated and so tranquil in the long flushed summer twilight, that it seemed the outside world could hardly wander hither with the burden of its cares and anguish. There to the left, with oaks again behind, arose the laden orchard and the vineyard slope. In front, the avenue opened out straight and broad, though shadowy with pleaching boughs of hickory, gum, and oak. No weird gray drapery trailed here, but from time to time a long graceful spray of vivid green moss came floating down. All through the cleared forest drifted the sunset redly on. Few sounds broke on the stillness. A mocking-bird was

pouring forth his varied full-toned melody from some far tree-top swaying in the breeze, which wafted the notes onward with a dying rustling of the leaves. A whip-poor-will was wailing from the hill-slope's edge. Along the border of the woodland moaned the cooing of a dove. And almost through the hush might reach the gurgle of a brook which trilled across the avenue, where presently this takes a downward curve, then up again.

A silence of unutterable peace, it might have seemed, to one who had not heard in the old days the laughter and light-hearted gayety these woods were wont to echo, till they fairly won their name of "Merry Oaks." And now the faint far stirring of the forest sounds might be but silence softly sighing in her sleep, as here the fragrant floating of the bloomy boughs might seem her slumbrous breath.

A casual glance upon the assemblage on the gallery would have confirmed that impression of a happy tranquillity. In the spacious doorway stood the tall gray-haired master of the house, his fragile dark-eyed wife upon his arm. Before them, on the gallery steps, was grouped a bevy of young girls, among whom more than one pretty face was their own. The tallest, with her Jewess-style, her rich deep coloring, and massy braids, was resting on the shoulder of her dimpled, laughing, brown-haired younger sister. Their friend, with that peach-bloom on her cheek, and the modest soft brown eyes cast down, was quite hemmed in by two dashing young couriers in "jackets of gray." And half a score in the loved uniform, of friends, or strangers always hospitably welcomed—on the way to Shreveport, bidding the surrender, or on the eve of a self-exile to Brazil or Mexico—now paused there, joining in the conversation, or gathered at a distance in knots of twos and threes. But not one in all that circle was more cordially incorporated into it, or turned to meet the kind eyes

looking on it, with more of heartfelt home-feeling, than the refugee who sat there, her hand in the clinging clasp of the bright little gipsy at her feet.

The hum of conversation was too broken and too sorrowfully languid to disturb the stillness. But now a chance word brought the memory of a battle of the past. No wonder that all eyes flashed eagerly upon the officer who spoke. For his earnest face was heroic in enthusiasm, his voice thrilled with impassioned fervor.

He ended. Tears of pride, and then of bitter, bitter disappointment, weighed down the dark uplifted lashes of the girl who stood beside him. She dashed them away with an impatient rebellion which would have betrayed Fadette in the mere gesture.

"Ay," said Charley, near her, glowing yet to victorious associations, "we have indeed fought a good fight. Can it surely be that it ends here?"

A hush of gloom fell over all.

For weeks this fear, now narrowing into certainty, had been closing round them. For days it was a vague, unformed, unsightly apparition—ghost, as it were, of a dead future, to be spoken of with every utterance of the lips, that thus it might be proven formless as a breath. Then for days, as it began to shape itself, it struck dismay and silence to each heart. And every member of the numerous household wandered restlessly apart, speechless, shrinking from each others' glances, lest they should confirm the dread—or sat together moodily, and little save a stifled groan or sigh to break the stillness. One evanescent ray of hope had flashed through the dark, with the report that the President had crossed to them—but soon it faded out. Those galleries had echoed to the sound of steps which paced them to and fro, striving thus to crush out and overwear the anguish of foreboding. And smoke, smoke,

smoke unceasingly, as if from the funeral pyre of every man's hope and ambition. Now on these last days had come a yearning, proud, and tender looking on the dead, dead struggle—soon, so soon, to be buried from sight where the seared and blood-dript earth was not ready to break forth in flowers. With hearts that never in the years to come could lose that pang, men and women stood watching the sudden death-throe they were powerless to stay. The strongest soldier felt no shame that women saw he turned aside because galling tears would force their way, or that he strove in vain to steady the hoarse choked tones.

"Ah," said Fadette, looking up to the first speaker, well assured that in the pause the minds of all had stayed on the same thought, "is it not a hideous night-mare, out of which we must awake? The utter impossibility of such an end never struck me more forcibly than yesterday, as we were driving out here from Shreveport. We had passed along Texas-street, and stopped at a corner, awaiting Mr. Weir. Near, across the way, was Governor Allen's State-store for the soldiers' families, where a stream pressed in with rolls of Louisiana State-money, destined for the burning in the lot behind. Two men were standing on the corner—one a tattered soldier, in whose hat there gleamed your crescent, cross, and star. His companion held a large roll of notes, and made a motion as if to toss them to our driver waiting on the pavement. But the soldier drew his arm back. I shall never forget the glorious resolution in his eyes when he cried, there were true men to make each dollar there yet good! But ah, poor fellow, his voice choked then. He drew his hat down over his brows, and turned sharply away."

"We 'orphans of the war,'" said a Missourian who leaned against the column above, "owe such a debt of gratitude to Louisiana's brave, true-hearted Governor, that

until his own voice bids, we dare not trample out these vestiges of his authority."

"Our lions rebel against being domesticated and purring before the hearth-stone," said Charley, with an effort to throw off the gloom.

"Domesticated—that includes the domus, does it not?" asked one of the exiles destined for the Imperial army in Mexico.

Fadette restlessly moved away. Beneath the jasmine trellis, half-way to the gate, she paused, embowered by the fragrant starry boughs.

Charley and one of the gentlemen had hardly joined her there, when the sound of hoof-beats neared along the avenue. And through the sweeping branches came a gleam of gray.

Fadette was watching idly, while her friend, who claimed a brother's privilege in the house, advanced to meet these latest comers.

"Three of them, Charley. How they are dashing up! And oh, what a handsome man the foremost!" she added, as he drew rein before the gate, and removing his cap, was making the usual soldier's request to stay for the night—followed by the usual cordial invitation.

"Those two behind—" Fadette began again. But she stopped short. For side by side, as they rode on, she recognized Captain Thorne—and Mr. Erle.

She caught Charley's arch bright glance, and her confusion increased.

"I wonder who that handsome man is?" she said hurriedly, in the longing for some sound louder than the beating of her own heart.

"What—who—why, Mr. Erle! Is it possible you do not know him?" Charley answered hesitatingly—perhaps, taken at unawares, hardly able to give the palm away from Harry Thorne.

He might indeed have justified that hesitation, as he came forward, flushed with pleasure at the meeting. The next moment he had taken Charley's hand. But Fadette drew back, half hidden by the jasmine boughs.

Her eyes were dazed with tears. She had not seen Ruthven Erle since they coldly parted on the Texan border, he then still an invalid, reclining in his ambulance. She had thought of him—daily, hourly—since. But in her thoughts the pallid hue of suffering was gone, and even his loss appeared unreal. She watched him now. The sleeve dangled across his breast, and the hand he laid upon the shoulder of his friend of the crescent, cross, and star, who now went forward to greet an old comrade, was slender even to emaciation.

Fadette was almost hidden in her green and snowy covert, when Mr. Erle recognized Charley with an exclamation of astonishment. In an instant he was at her side, and receiving a heartfelt welcome. Then followed a quick glance around and an inquiry for Amy. But no mention of Fadette's name.

Charley explained that their kind friends at "Merry Oaks" had come to Amy at Shreveport, insisting upon taking home one and all. For since the surrender was now inevitable, to live was fast becoming a problem, from generals' families to clerks.

And still no word of Fadette. She never once dreamed of anger at his forgetfulness. She was looking reverently upon him, thinking with what sacrifices he had sealed his fealty to his country. A maimed and ruined man—a broken, ruined land—he wan with suffering for her—she wasted, desolate. The thought brought a grief which stifled Fadette. And with it came the recollection of Matoaca. In bitter self-disdain she scoffed at the idea of Ruthven's lowering his proud head to a level with herself,

when Matoaca stood by in the full stature of a perfect woman. And with an almost sob, she owned that all was as it should be. Her own faint-throbbing heart could never lift him above pain. And though no soul could lean more gently, yet since he was worn and weary now, he did well to seek a statelier love to lean upon.

She was startled by his turning quietly to her. Must he not have seen her all this while? But she could judge of nothing from his face. The compassionate tearful eyes lifted unhesitatingly to his were hardly what he cared to see. For after shaking hands, as a footstep now approached, he presented

"My cousin, Colonel Erle"—then left them together.

For Amy stood upon the steps beside her husband, one arm outstretched to Ruthven with a sweet low quivering cry.

Fadette had glanced up at the stranger, a light breaking over her face, as over her mind. He was walking on abstractedly beside her.

"Colonel Erle," she cried in an abrupt almost whisper, "you have been in Arkansas?"

An expression of vivid interest flashed into his eyes at once.

"Have you perhaps heard me spoken of there?" he asked quickly.

She laughed outright. And catching her arch glance, he joined in with a shade of embarrassment in his manner. Yet not an embarrassment of which he wished to rid himself, apparently. For he stopped under the tall white rose which at that moment overarched their path. And raising his arm to gather a cluster, much as if at her request, he detained her.

"Won't you throw a glimmer of light upon my path?" he said, bending low, while he stripped the thorns from the flower-stem, and offered it.

Fadette looked up at him wonderingly.

"I know you are her dearest friend," he went on; "you can tell me if I am mad to follow still. Ruthven brought me her miniature, that is true—but she rather permitted than sent it. And she has been so cold, so cruelly unforgiving! Of course I ought to have been free before asking to bind another. But my chains were so light that I well-nigh forgot them. And the truth is, I was afraid to confess. That unfortunate 'if-for-me-thou-dost-forsake' sentiment has made many a wretch wish both Moore and himself at the bottom of that frozen lake."

Despite the humorous tone in which these words were uttered, Fadette was touched by the uncontrollable anxiety of his manner. She answered softly:

"To say truth, Colonel Erle, she has never once mentioned your name. But a very few days before we parted, she—I think she was betrayed into saying that to love once is to love always, strive against it as one will, and that time crumbles down pride's strongest barriers. I remember her own words, because they quivered on her proud beautiful lips. And her eyes were luminous in tears—so luminous, that they might lend the glimmer which you seek." She ended with a smile that flitted on her upturned face.

His lowered toward her.

Warmly he took her hand toying with the rosebuds. Even as he did so, her eyes wandered toward the gallery. And she instantly comprehended Matoaca's unfaith, and wished the dark lady's lover somewhat less effusive in the friendly way. For Ruthven Erle, conversing with one of the young ladies of the house, stood fronting her, and she thought she could perceive an expression of displeasure.

When Fadette and Colonel Erle approached, Amy had started, then came forward, and extended a cordial welcome, yet with a faint flush, and head bent slightly toward

her husband. He returned a smile, as he shook hands with his ancient rival.

"Why, how have you found your way to the Confederacy?" said Amy, unembarrassed in a moment—"For we still are the Confederacy."

"Direct to and from Alexandria, Cousin Amy. There I met Ruthven here, and pushed on to take you *en route*—for Brazil."

Fadette raised her head hastily.

He bent his, adding to her very low—

"Missouri also lies upon the way—is it not so?"

"To Brazil!" exclaimed Amy concernedly. "Surely, my dear cousin, you will not go alone, a stranger in a strange land?"

The brightness of hope, a radiance more than a mere smile, illumined his whole face.

"I trust, not alone," he said.

And Harry Thorne chimed in:

"Will you deliver him into my keeping, Mrs. Weir? We go together. But he has stipulated that I am to lurk in parts unknown to Mr. Yank, in Texas, until some weeks are passed, when he will take me on the road to sail from Galveston. What can he intend doing with those weeks?" he questioned, gayly. He, too, had spent that spring of sixty-one in Arkansas, when Colonel Erle had made no disguise of his attentions to Miss Vaughan.

"Captain Thorne! You going?" cried Fadette.

Charley did not speak. Her face was as a mask, and her fingers continued to tap a tattoo upon the column against which she stood apart.

"Going indeed. You are sorry? I thank you. I have no one to regret me—no one to say as much," he ended half angrily, with an involuntary movement toward Charley.

With that, Charley turned sharply round—

"And what will you do in Brazil, Captain Thorne? Those pampas are a fine field for your old profession of jayhawking. It is not to be presumed that you will turn in and maul rails."

Harry's color rose, and he had some difficulty in repressing a retort. But he said instead:

"The heyday of jayhawking is over, Miss Charley. Work, work, hard work—a log cabin put up by my own hands—a clearing in the wood—no servant but my man Tom, who, after four years of campaigning with his master, has no disposition to fly off the handle now. All these, and freedom. Aye, and exile," he added sadly. "But beware, you, my stay-at-home friends—when you become liege subjects of the United States, you become my lawful prey. I shall consider myself quite at liberty, coming back one of these fine days, to jerk you all out of the last red."

"And will you too return thus, Mr. Erle?" Fadette said in seeming carelessness, shrinking from a more direct question as to whether he were to be an exile too.

"I do not go," he answered, with a coldness which touched her to the quick.

"Ah," she cried, "I do not see how one can brook to stay here! The very atmosphere is heavy with battle-smoke—we cannot know a moment's forgetfulness—not draw one free breath! We should go—all—all of us—and leave the land a desert."

"Leave our native soil, our old associations, and that battle-smoke which still bears upward many a comrade's parting breath? And what, for instance, could a mutilated, ruined man, such as I, do in a colony? However, it is not with me a question of expediency."

"No," ~~returned~~ Harry Thorne—"Erle has the idea firmly rooted that the South has need still of the 'so-

called.' Now I cannot see it in that light. But should a brighter day ever dawn, here we shall be found again, ready to wake snakes as in days gone by. But just now we are ourselves in danger of falling into the torpid state"—and he began to hum after a most drowsy fashion—"Wake me up when—dies."

"When who dies?" Amy asked.

"'Whistle o'er the lave o't,'" interrupted Ruthven quickly. "My dear Amy, our hot-headed friend has his own ideas far too fully developed for a young captain confessedly ignorant."

"Not so ignorant," retorted Harry, "but that he can give you all a wonderful piece of information. What do you think it can be, Mrs. Weir?" he asked, impatient of the shade of thought which in the pause began to darken every face.

"What indeed?" returned Amy, with a faint show of interest.

"An early victim to the matrimonial fever which I prophesy will rage as high as the Brazilian. Miss Grahame married some three weeks since."

"Miss Grahame!"

"Do you remember a certain beardless youth"—(Harry Thorne had acquired a fair imperial)—"who in the winter of 'sixty-two was quite devoted? He certainly filled her bill, and last winter the acquaintance progressed at Washington, our pleasant Arkansas retreat, where it consummated in—I had nearly said 'darkness and the death-hour rounding it.'"

"Which goes to prove," commented Charley, "that love is written on the heart in sympathetic ink, and needs but warmth to bring it out."

"Miss Charley, say that once again," cried Harry Thorne, going over to her where she still stood somewhat withdrawn.

"A brash speech, Captain Thorne," she returned composedly. "We must all learn to talk as straight as if we were in a dug-out, if you take up chance words thus."

For some moments he paused before her, downcast and silent. Then, as if inspired by a sudden resolve, he spoke—

"What will you do in this land of desolation, Miss Charley?"

She only shook her head. She had no voice to speak. The remembrance of her utter isolation crushed her with a weight too suffocating.

Harry Thorne's eyes sparkled.

"Charley," he said, with precipitate fervor, "I am come that, vainly or not, I might ask you to go to Brazil with me."

She looked at him, but ignored his hand outstretched. She folded her arms, and waited thus an instant, firm and self-reliant as a man might have been. She did not affect to misunderstand the full import of his words, although her gaze did not waver, but full and free met his. Yet the hot blood swept up to her brow.

"You know that I am able to stand alone, Captain Thorne? You know that I have need of the generous protection of no man?"

His hope died darkly out. He stammered:

"I know that well—and—I know that, for the second time, I have made an egregious fool of myself. But," he went on resolutely, "do not imagine all ends here. So long as no one else can claim this hand—"

He grasped it as he spoke.

She turned her head away.

"Take care," she answered, brokenly; "there is blood upon it. Can you be sure that it is a woman's, or a comrade's?"

“Charley!”

She was trembling as he could not have dreamed any thing had power to move her. It was answer all-sufficient.

“The hand is mine. The blood I take upon me—so—” he affirmed, daringly. And he drew the passive fingers within his arm.

And pacing up and down the gallery thus, remembered words came to his lips, full and warm as any from his own heart could be:

“Your wisdom may declare
That womanhood is proved the best
By golden brooch and glossy vest
The mincing ladies wear—
Yet is it proved, and was of old,
Anear as well, I dare to hold,
By truth, or by despair.

“Oh, womanly she prayed in tent
When none beside did wake—
Oh, womanly she paled in fight
For—*one beloved's sake?*
And her little hand, defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood
Most woman-pure did make.”

“Only think!” Charley laughed, shaking off those tears with a brave effort—“a poem on prosaic me! Truly, swans do sometimes take themselves for ugly ducks!”

An hour after, Fadette stole apart unseen. Music, and the blaze of light within the drawing-room, sent her out into the gallery for quiet.

She passed round to the side, and upon the steps which here also ascended from the garden, she took her seat, ensconced behind a column from view of the windows opening to the floor. Thence on the hush of the outer air vibrated the melody of fresh girlish voices, with the deeper

chorus of the gentlemen. Fadette sighed, remembering that her ties to the dear old place were parting even now. True, she had mingled in many a lighter-hearted scene at Merry Oaks. Now there was at best a calm. But a calm in which one strove to linger, lest just beyond the smoothness should crash down the cataract.

Even the music took the current of the thoughts of all. "The Outward Bound" went home to more than one listener, with the sweep of waters soon to roll between. And as the melancholy "Moon behind the Hill" ensued, Fadette's gaze wandered on to the oak-crowned slope before her, just above which the moon was peering now. There she seemed to see another hill where the moon was wont to rise on the far Chesapeake. Another stanza brought a heavy sigh, with the vision of a prairie grave, which the moon did not watch over, as in the song, in the familiar scenes of childhood. Those scenes—were they forever vanished? Might her guardian gain the old home back? Proudly she recalled his words when last he stood there: "Shall I loose the true Randolph Honor, to hold fast its emblem, these old walls and acres?" Then his other words recurred—and with them, how her pulses quickened: "My will-'o-the-wisp cannot be won back from Carolina marshes." Would any one indeed seek to detain her there?

She started and looked up guiltily, at a man's step on the gallery. She knew well whom she should see there. But he had not known. For he spoke Amy's name, then hastily apologized for his mistake in the half dark.

Fadette hesitated, then drew aside the white folds of her dress which had swept over half the steps.

"Won't you stay, Mr. Erle? 'The moon behind the hill' is improved by yonder illustration," she ended with a gesture across to the silvered woodland crest.

He threw himself almost at her feet, his elbow resting on

a step above. Yet his eyes did not meet hers, but were uplifted to the brilliant skies. Hers therefore lingered unobserved upon that careworn countenance. She herself grew careworn with the watching. And to break the silence which became oppressive, she asked if he would return to "Beauregard," or to Carolina with the Weirs, Charley, and herself.

"Beauregard is but a wilderness," he made reply—"burnt and waste, and I have nothing to expend upon it. No—if my horses will defray travelling-expenses, I shall go to Carolina, and there take whatsoever my left hand findeth to do for the present."

"Ah, then you will go with us." There was a thrill of pleasure in her voice.

He turned full upon her.

"Except it be a freak of chance," he said slowly, "I see you to-night for the last time in my life."

"Oh, Mr. Erle, why—why—" she began, shocked beyond her self-control.

"Hush," he said very low. "You speak of what you do not understand. To you it is pleasant, doubtless, to keep fast associations of the past four years. You gladly welcome a friend who brings these back to you. But have you thought what it must be to me? After to-night, I will rather die than meet you. Do you dream I can be with you, and yet see the gulf between us, over which I cannot draw you to myself?"

The voice was stifled, and stopped short. His head was bowed, and a stern fortitude marked the set features. But a brilliant smile lit up Fadette's. Slowly she dropped her hand, until it rested on his shoulder.

He started up, and the light touch fell off. She rose too, trembling now.

"Not so," he said proudly. "I scorn to take from pity

that which love refused me. Do you think I did not mark the shrinking and the coldness which grew on you before we parted last November? Do you think I have forgot that parting? Far be it from me to reject your sympathy—but I will have none of it enshrined in the high place of love.”

She shrank back, steadying herself against the column, that he might not see how she was quivering in every limb.

“If—one—had cared for you,” she almost whispered, “is this a time when that feeling could grow cold?”

“Ay—‘The love cannot be the same.’” He quoted her own words, with a short hard laugh.

She stood no more aloof, shrinking, downcast, and timid. With a swift gliding movement she drew near, and laid both hands on his arm, looking up at him fearlessly, the whole light of her soul in her eyes.

“Should I do this,” she began steadily; “if—if”—she faltered—“Will you then force me to say—this is no pity—it is—love.”

Then the blushes surged across her face. She dropped her hands, and drew back hurriedly. She turned her head—in another instant would have flitted beyond his reach, safe in the drawing-room. But, quick as thought, he caught her hand.

“Have you remembered”—he demanded; bending to seek his answer in her averted face—“have you remembered how feeble is this one arm to guard you, to uphold you—ay, even to hold you fast?”

The slender little fingers he still kept, impulsively tightened upon his. She had no words, but the action spoke for her. It acknowledged a bond closer than his holding fast.

He grew very pale.

“It is too much. I dare not bind her to such a sacrifice,” he muttered.

She turned at that.

"You do not understand," she said. "This it is, which you are to decide—Whether you go your way this night, and leave me helpless; or whether you will let me rest on your strong soul, while you—will it, can it comfort you?—are leaning on me—thus."

She lifted his hand, and laid it on her shoulder, emboldened by the incredulous gaze which he still fixed upon her.

He roused at that.

"Do you know," he said, looking into her upraised face with a tumult of emotions surging over his, "have you considered that which you are choosing now? For that choice once fully made, I know not how you shall ever be released. The future is dim before me; I have no longer a bright home to offer you—"

"Hark, Mr. Erle!" she interposed, with a gesture of attention toward the house, and a tremulous light in the sweet eyes dropped bashfully from his—"Do you hear what they are singing? Listen!"

Clear and thrilling in its melody, swept out upon the moonlit hush:

"The heart of the soldier's the home of his wife,
Imogen!

The heart of the soldier's the home of his wife."

"Nevermore to be released!" Ruthven Erle exclaimed triumphantly. And his left arm drew her to her home.



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